The American Journal of Anthropomorphics

ISSUE
1
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Written by Jose Calderón
Illustrated by Daphne Lage

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Tall Tails

Anthropomorphics With Attitude

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The American Journal of Anthropomorphics

SEPTEMBER 1993 ISSUE No. 1

ARTWORK

3 Eric Schwartz
9 Robert Guthrie
15 Steven Martin
21 Kyla Littlejohn
27 Daphne Lage
33 Jeff Wood
39 Josef Ricketts
45 Dan Flahive
51 Mark Mandolia
57 Michael-Scot McMurry
63 Rubin Rodriguez

INTERVIEW

69 Dave Sim, Author of Cerebus, founder of Aardvark-Vanaheim Inc. speaks briefly on his success in the publishing business.

PUBLICATION REVIEWS

71 Revelations and Tall Tails

ARTIST'S CORNER

72 Kyla Littlejohn details her drawing technique.

STORIES

75 Peacock, by Kishma Danielle, Illustrated by Kyla Littlejohn
83 Tales from the Reservation, Illustrated by Daphne Lage

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Foreword by the Editor

"What, exactly, are Anthropomorphics?" is the question most people ask upon first seeing a publication such as this. The answer, of course, is relatively simple. An anthropomorphic character is any object or animal given human-like attributes. They are most often associated with the characters seen in today's cartoons, although the industry term "funny animals" is sometimes used in the case of such characters. But when one thinks about it, one realizes that this sort of characterization is all about us; they are used to sell cereals, video games, snack foods, clothing... the use of "funny animals" in advertising has been growing steadily for the past ten years and continues to do so unabated.

But unlike other genres, the anthropomorphic, or "furry" artist occupies a special niche in the industry. It seems as though you either "have it" and manage to get employed by a large, wealthy firm, or you don't... and earning a living through your talent is a difficult task. The middle ground is hard to find. The truth of the matter is that most of these companies do not know where to turn for quality artwork and take the nearest thing at hand. There is no authoritative compendium of works for them to select from, no volume of "head shots".

The purpose of this publication is to provide that compendium. It is a forum for some of the top artists in this genre to showcase their works. It is a publication for the benefit of the artists; most of the funds generated through sales of the piece are returned to them in the form of royalties. In addition, contact information has been provided for each artist whenever possible so that interested readers can contact them and commission artwork or offer employment on various projects. To help in this, complimentary copies of this publication are sent to advertising agencies, animation companies and other publishers.

While other publications of its type exist, a concerted effort was made to produce as high quality a product as possible, from the selection of paper to the content and layout. We hope you enjoy it. Thank you for supporting our efforts on behalf of the artists herein!

Darrell Benvenuto, Editor
Med Systems Company
September, 1993

Eric Schwartz

Background

Most widely known for his series of computer animations on the Commodore Amiga, Eric's character Amy the Squirrel has enjoyed an ever-increasing level of popularity since he entered the field in 1989.

Eric has a number of his animations available on videotape, as well as many still shots in both color and black & white. Write to him for a price list.

Commissioned Artwork

Eric does not often accept commissions, as he is kept fairly busy with his own projects, but he will on occasion. Prices vary, depending on the type and nature of the request. Contact him for more information if you are interested.

Mr. Eric Schwartz
Eric Schwartz Productions
Post Office Box 292684
Kettering, OH 45429-0684




Sabrina
©1993 Eric W. Schwartz

©1993 Eric W. Schwartz
Amy

I never figured you for the vain type.

Well, Everybody is - a little.

once in a while.



©1993 Eric W. Schwartz

"Damn, that's Comfy!"


©1993 Eric W. Schwartz



©1992 Eric W. Schwartz

Robert Guthrie

Background

Mr. Guthrie is a hard fellow to find, and he likes it that way. He has been hailed by some as one of the premier genre artists out there. His clean line style and beautiful shading techniques are the envy of many artists the world over.

His work has been seen less as of late, but it has not reduced in quality one iota, as can be seen in our one 1993 Guthrie piece.

Commissioned Artwork

Mr. Guthrie is not accepting commissions at this time. He may be contacted through writing to the publisher at the address below (who will forward letters received to him), but there is no guarantee he will answer.

Mr. Robert Guthrie, Artist
Med Systems Company
Post Office Box 656715
Fresh Meadows, NY 11365



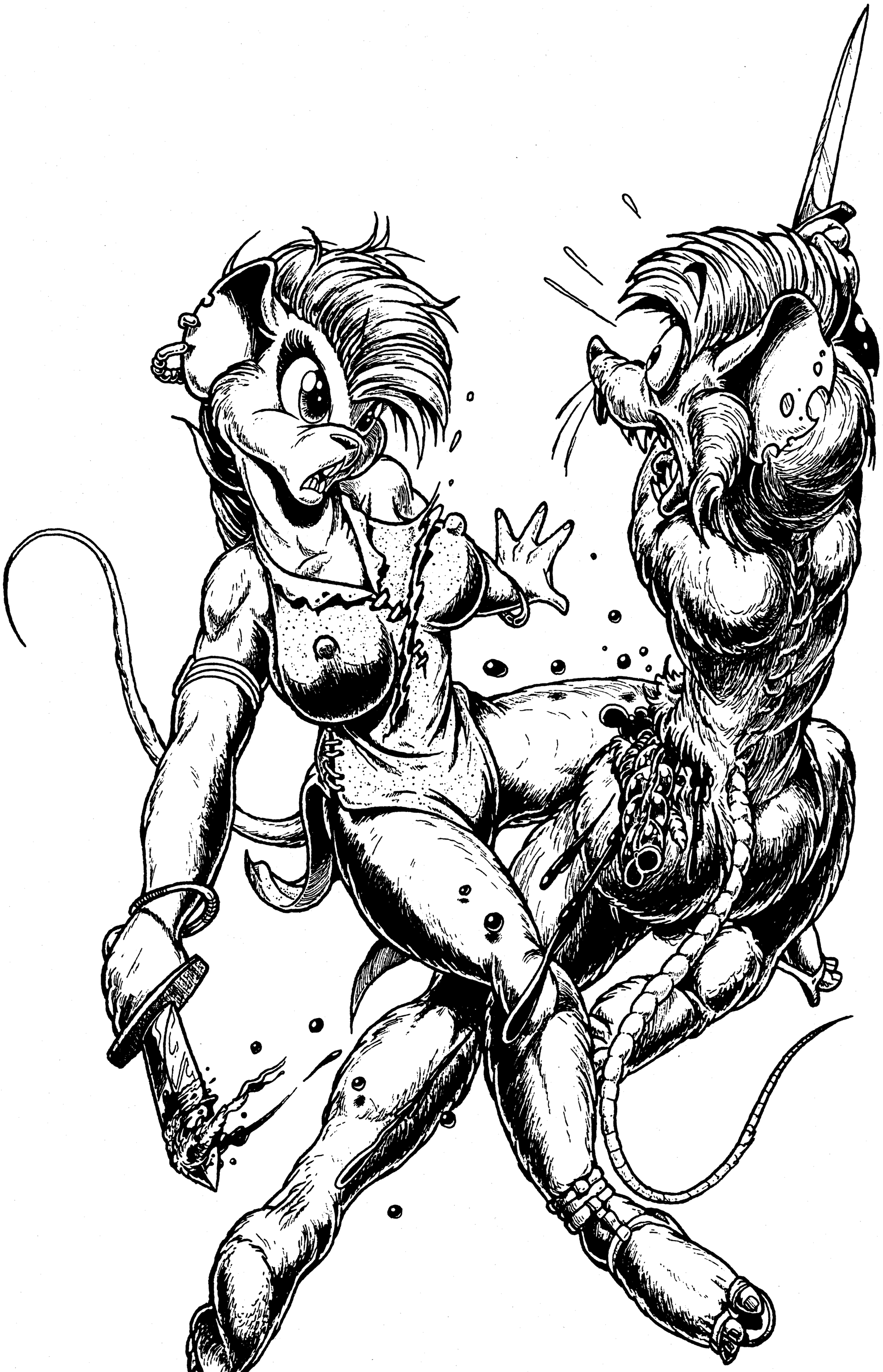
JARVIS AND MAIN'S

KIT-KAT™



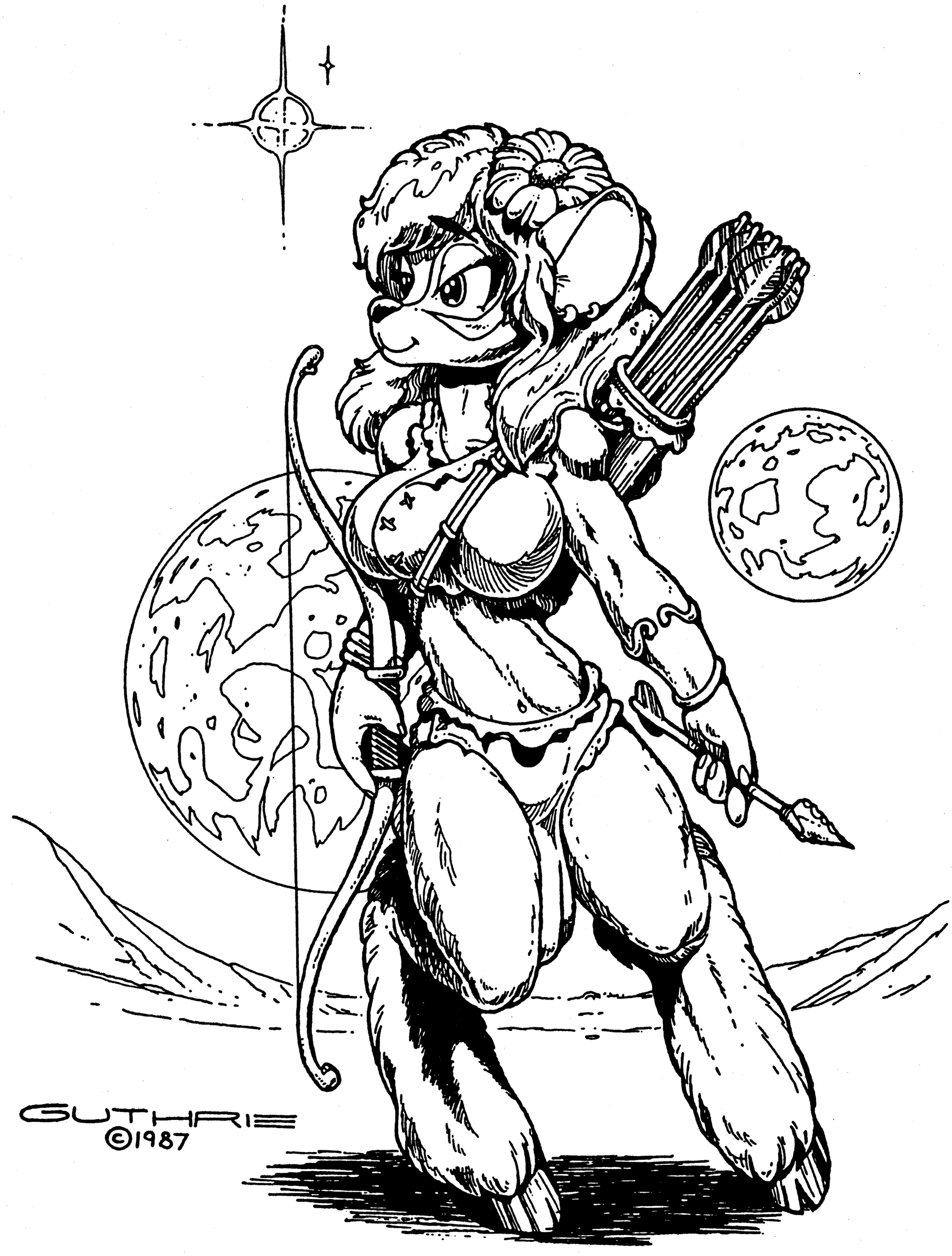


©1988-23 GUTHRIE



©88-1 GUTHRIE.


Guthrie 93


GUTHRIE
©1987

Steven Martin

Background

Mr. Martin is a very well-known artist in the field of funny animal illustration; his technical proficiency is second to none when it comes to rendering images in acrylics. His characters seem to leap off the canvas at you, stunning and vibrant. Steve can be found at almost all of the conventions across the USA each year, selling high-quality photographic repros of his color pieces.

Commissioned Artwork

Mr. Martin accepts commissions, although the costs vary depending on the complexity of the request. Write to him at the address below with your request for more information. Catalogs of his work are available for $5 each from him or from the publisher.

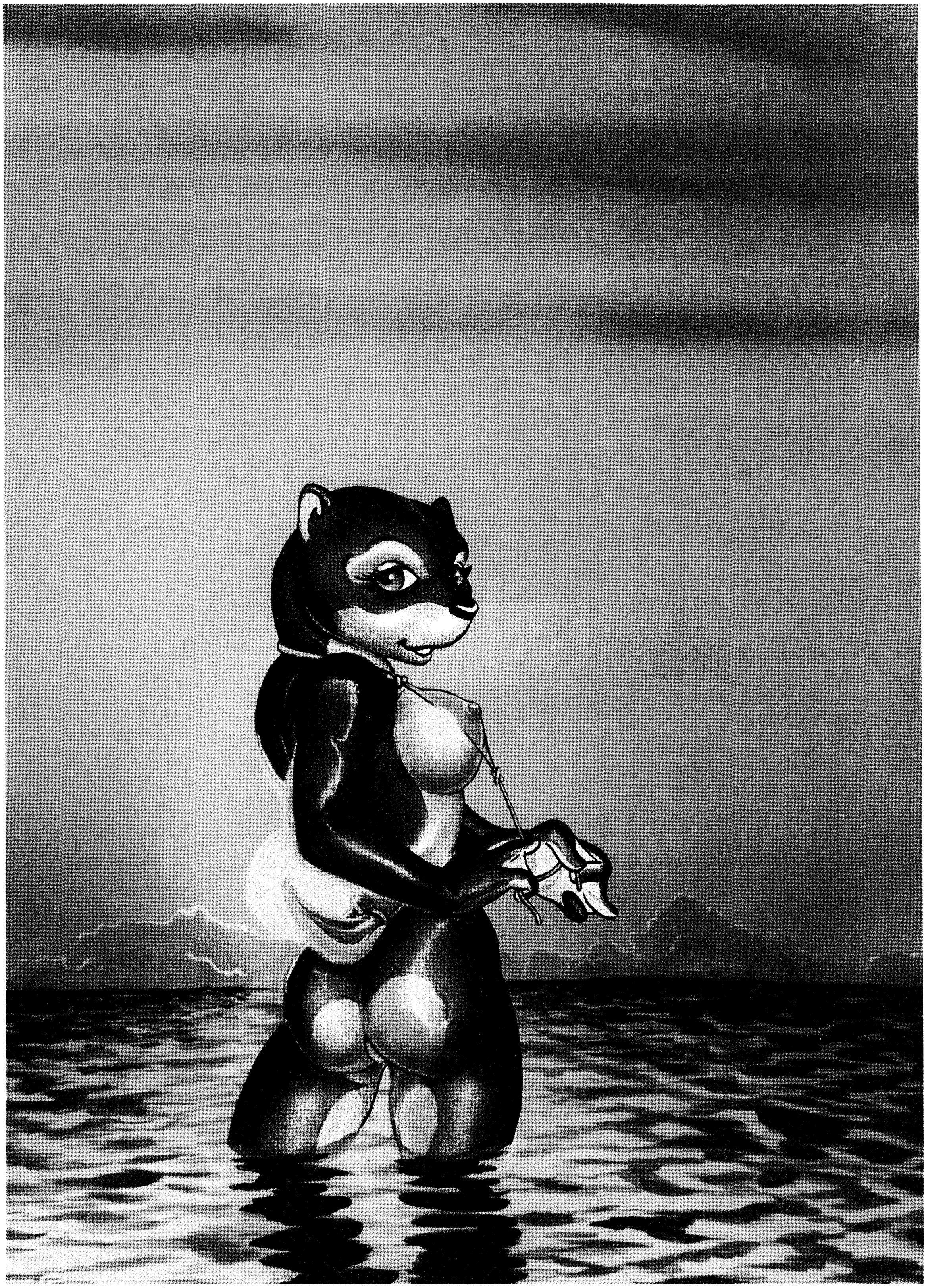
Mr. Steven Martin
12932 Yorba Street
Santa Ana, CA 92705












Martin 08'

Kyla Littlejohn

Background

Kyla Littlejohn is a relative newcomer to the field of "funny animal" illustration. She has been featured in Furrlough, Genus and several APAs. Her clean line art and liquid eye styles are usually noticed first by viewers of her works.

She manages to put out a large quantity of high-quality artwork despite being married, working and having five children! Our hat's off to you, Kyla!

Commissioned Artwork

Mrs. Littlejohn does accept commissioned work, but her rates differ based on the complexity of the request. She also has several portfolios for sale. Write to her at the address below for more information.

Mrs. Kyla Littlejohn
Post Office Box 2313
Cottonwood, AZ 86326


Kyla ©1993



KYLA ©1993



Kyla©1993



©Kyla 1993
"Jamera" and "Raven
©Shayna Rhane Productions 1993



Kyla ©1993 "The Slip"

Daphne Lage

Background

Daphne was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1971, and has been drawing anthropomorphic characters from a very young age. Her goal has originally been a career in animation, inspired by the animations of Walt Disney.

Ms. Lage entered the School of Visual Arts on a full, four-year scholarship. She was lured away from her original goal of being an animator by the world of comic book illustration and in June of 1993, her first comic book, Tall Tails, saw release, published by Golden Realm Unlimited, Inc. A review of this great piece is in this issue.

Ms. Lage's characters are considerably different from the normal sort of caricature found in anthropomorphic illustration. They are cranky, extremely strong-willed and capable of extreme acts of violence. In addition, her dynamic, flowing style of illustration has drawn many favorable comments from viewers. Her artwork is expected to gain steadily in popularity with the release of subsequent issues of Tall Tails.

Ms. Lage's artwork has been featured in several APA's, as well as Furloose!, Bestairy, Midnight Sands and Furplay.

Ms. Lage has also illustrated Tales from the Reservation, one of the stories to be found in this and subsequent Issues of the American Journal of Anthropomorphics.

Commissioned Artwork

Ms. Lage does a large quantity of commissioned artwork and has established a fairly regular pricing system for pinups consisting of no more than two characters. Artwork larger or with complex details can be worked out separately.

9x12	B&W Inked	$ 20.00
9x12	Ink & Marker	$ 25.00
9x12	Grey Penciled	$ 35.00
9x12	Color Pencil	$ 40.00
11x14	B&W Inked	$ 30.00
11x14	Ink & Marker	$ 40.00
11x14	Grey Penciled	$ 45.00
11x14	Color Pencil	$ 50.00
$ 2.00	S&H on each 9x12 piece	
$ 5.00	S&H on each 11x14 piece	
$ 5.00	S&H on each 9x12 Cel	

Animation Cels, with your character(s) inked and painted on acetate and mounted over a decorated background.

9x12 Color $ 150.00 Each

Nudity and soft-core erotica are no problem but

<u>TASTE IS A MUST</u>

Guidelines Available by mail if such pieces are requested

Send money orders and character specifications to

Ms. Daphne Lage
FDR Station, P.O. Box 671
New York, NY 10150





The Adventures of Red Kanga and Wanda by Daphne Lage



GAK!

UH-OH!

WANDA! HELP ME! WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!

WEREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO HELP ME FIGHT?! I THOUGHT YOU WANTED A PIECE OF THE ACTION!

UH... I CHANGED MY MIND...!

Daphne Gaeta ©1993



Jeff Wood

Background

Mr. Wood is most widely known from his character Snobuni and his Mechanimoids, a style of illustration uniquely Wood. Viewers immediately liken his work to more conventional Anime, but this is due to his style of oversized, liquid eyes more than anything else.

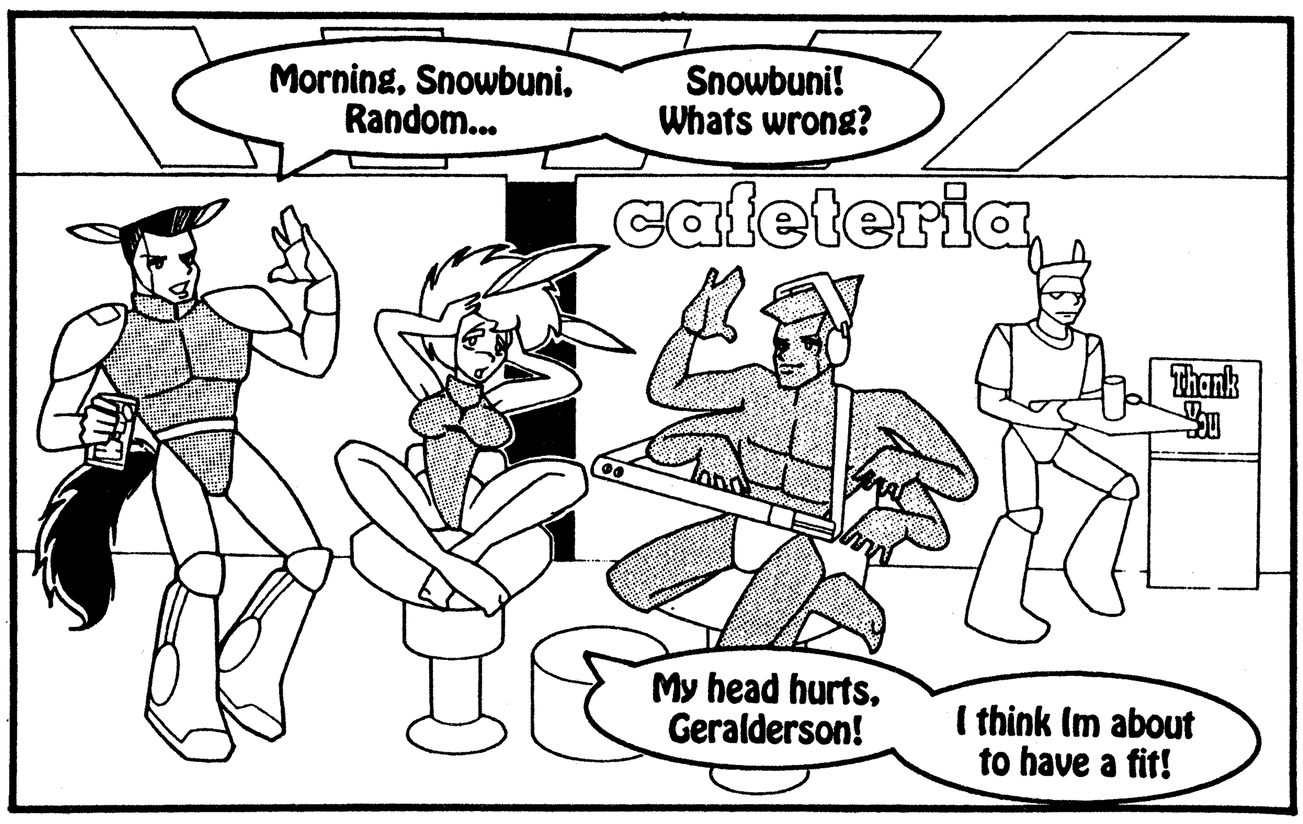
His piece, Primal Hunger, is completely new, and was executed solely for inclusion in the AJA.

Commissioned Artwork

Mr. Wood is not accepting commissions at this time due to a serious backlog of the same as he continues his college coursework. However, The Best of Snobuni Blizzard #1, a compilation of artwork by many artists is available through Jeff at $2 each, Postpaid.

Mr. Jeff Wood
705 Lewis Street
Moscow, ID 83843-3512



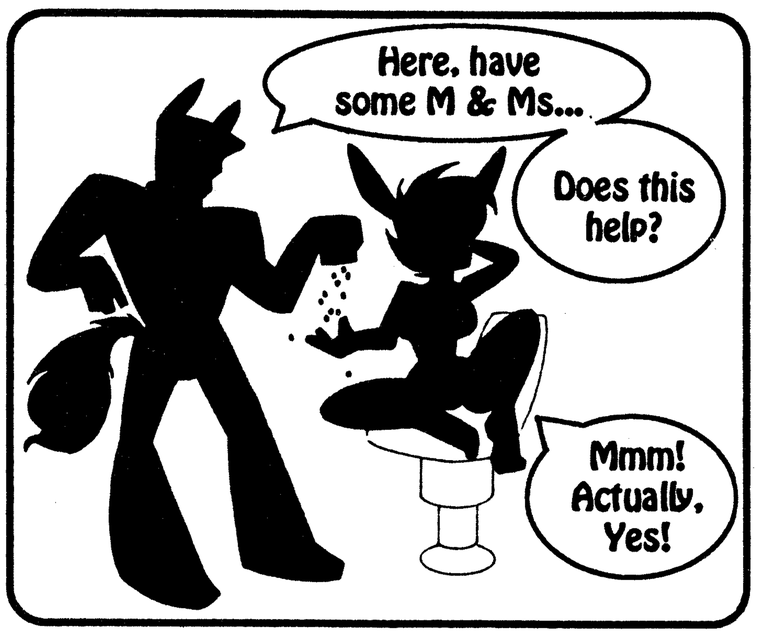


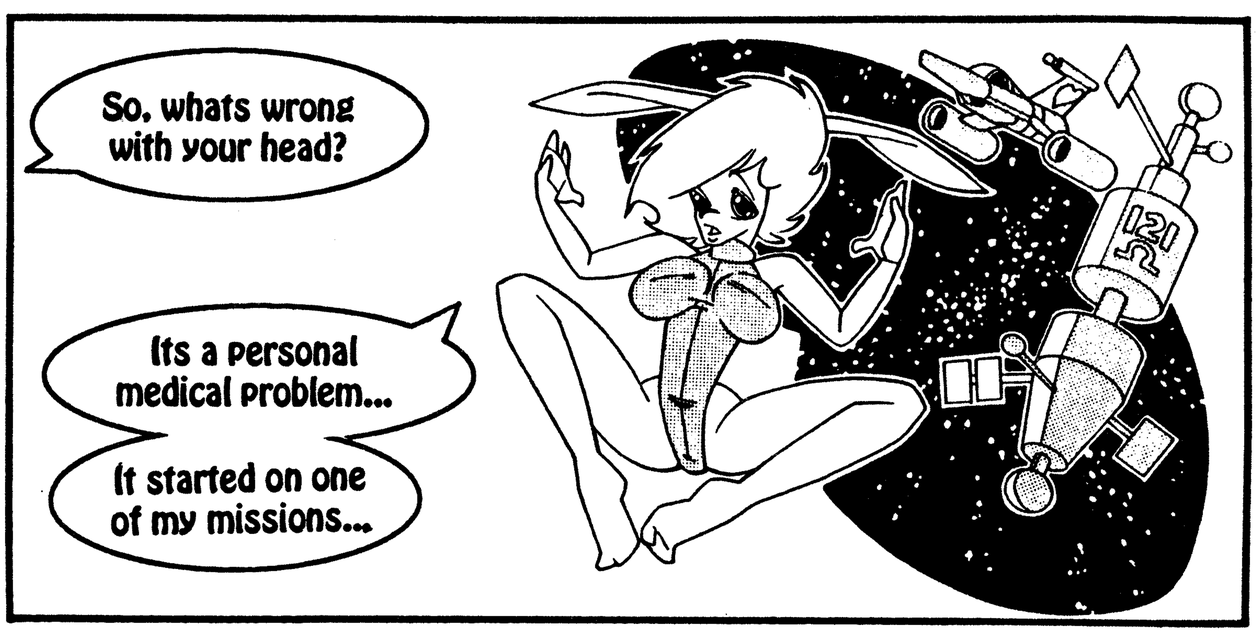
Primal Hunger

Words & Pictures by Jeff Wood

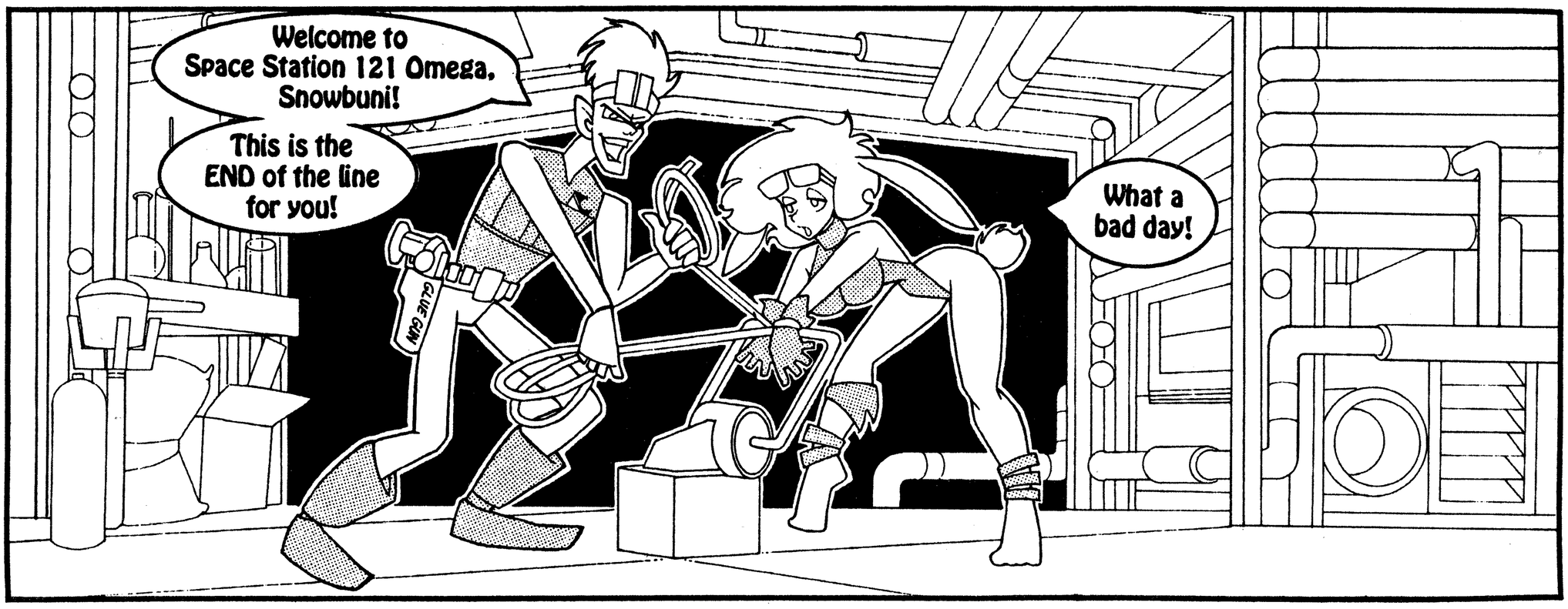
M & M candy TM Mars Candy Co

Mechanimoids copyright 1993 Jeff Wood

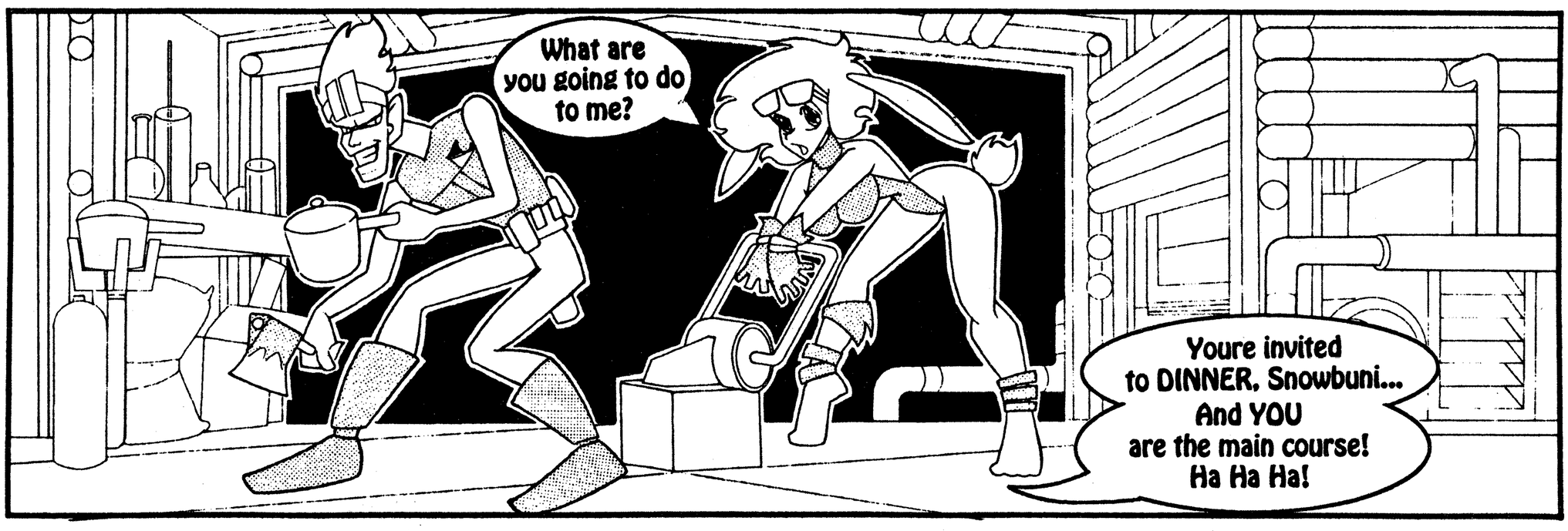




... I had been captured by the nefarious Doctor Napalm!



Trapped, drugged, bound, I was helpless before all his vile machinations!



You see, I am familiar with you Lapin Sylvalagi!

I happen to know that youre composed of both human and animal parts!

By chemically suppressing your human genomes, I can force you into your rabbit form!

And I am so sick of dehydrated, rehydrated, and reconstituted rations!

I have a HUNGER for FRESH MEAT!

So, today Im having RABBIT STEW for dinner!

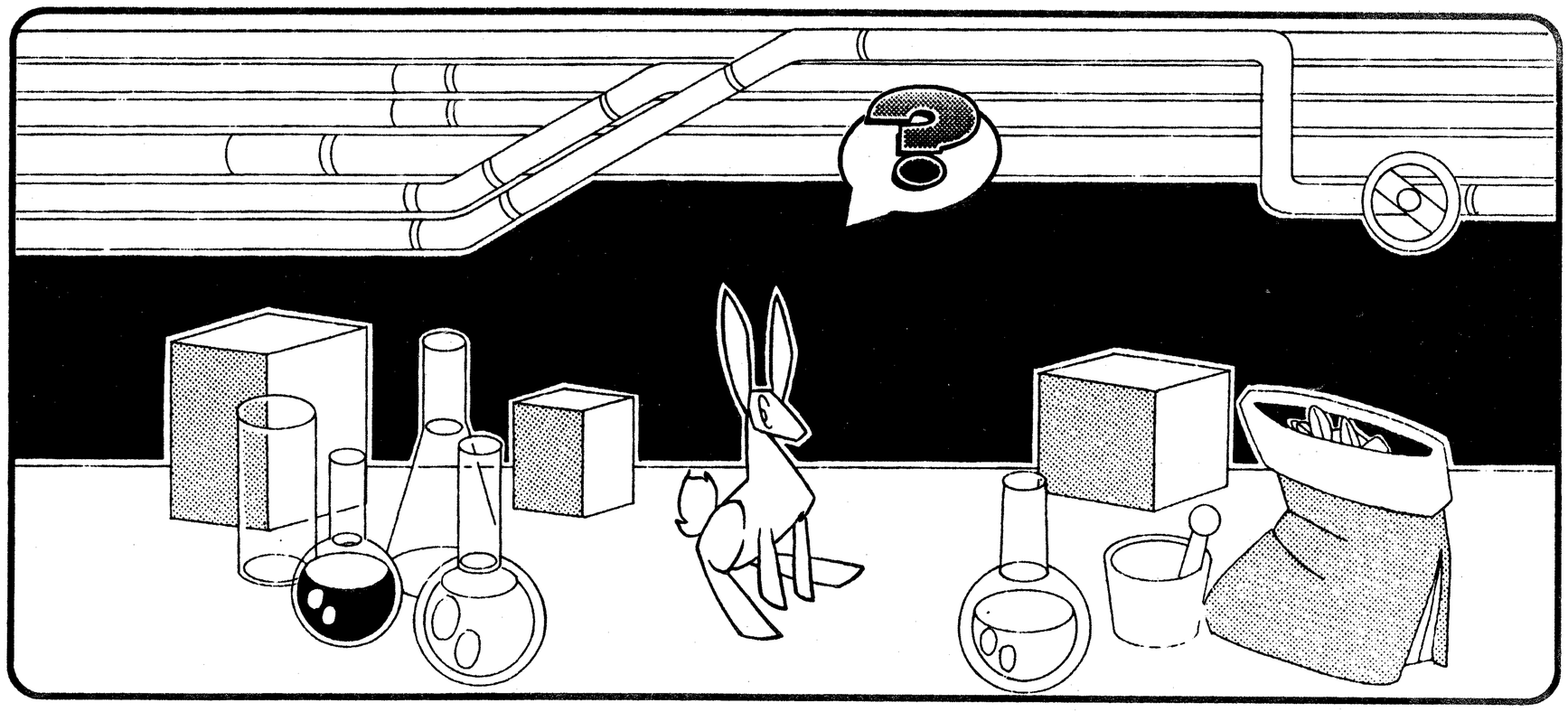
Ha Ha Ha!

...and just like that, I reverted back to my rabbit form!

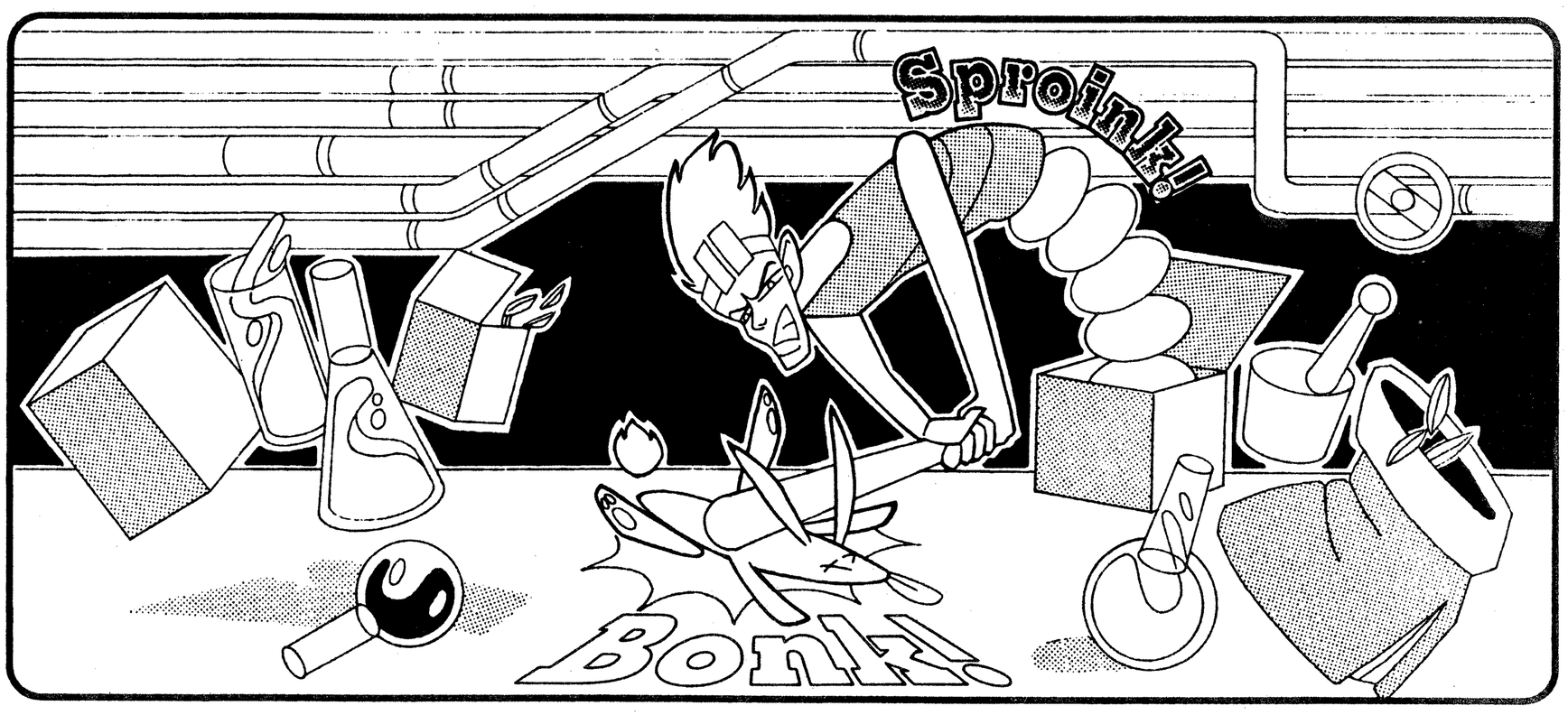
...I had to find that antidote to that DNA suppresor, and quick!

WHAM!

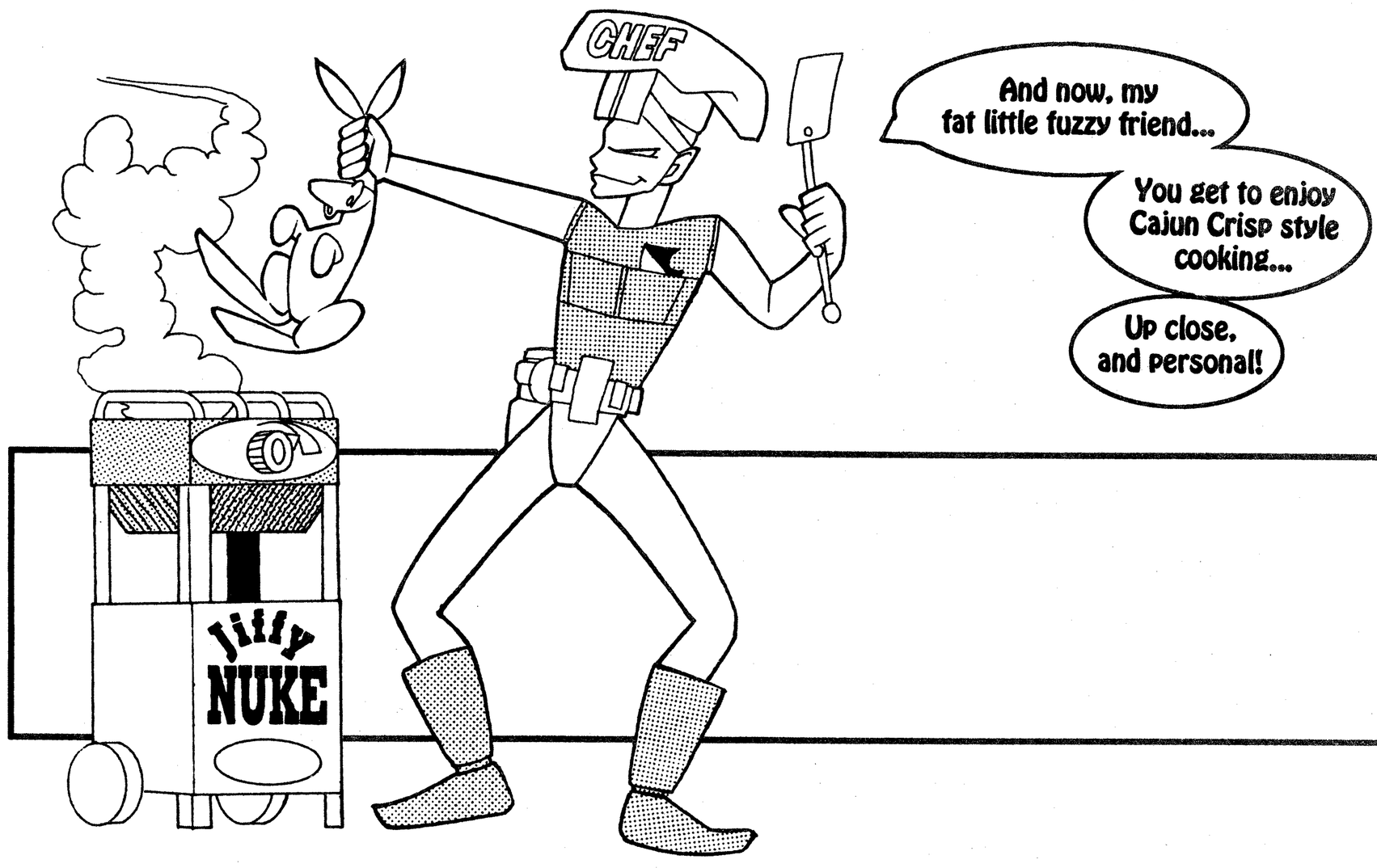
But what was the common element among all these compounds and ingrediants?



... I had just enough time to notice the mortar and pestle, the boxes from South America, the dried leaves...



...and then it hit me!



Cacao Seeds!
The secret ingrediant was a chocolate derivative!

Bunny Attack!

Skritch! Skritch! Skritch!

Ow! Ow!

Quit scratching, you fuzzy furball!

Munch Munch Munch!

Hey! Thats my CANDY BAR!

Munch?

Ulp! My dinner!

No rabbit stew tonight!

Say GOODBYE to your MANHOOD, loser!

AAAiiieee!!!

cafeteria

Thank You

I still have flashbacks from that first injection, though...

If I dont get enough chocolate, I turn back into a white rabbit!

Is any of this story true, Random?

No. Shes a raving chocholic!

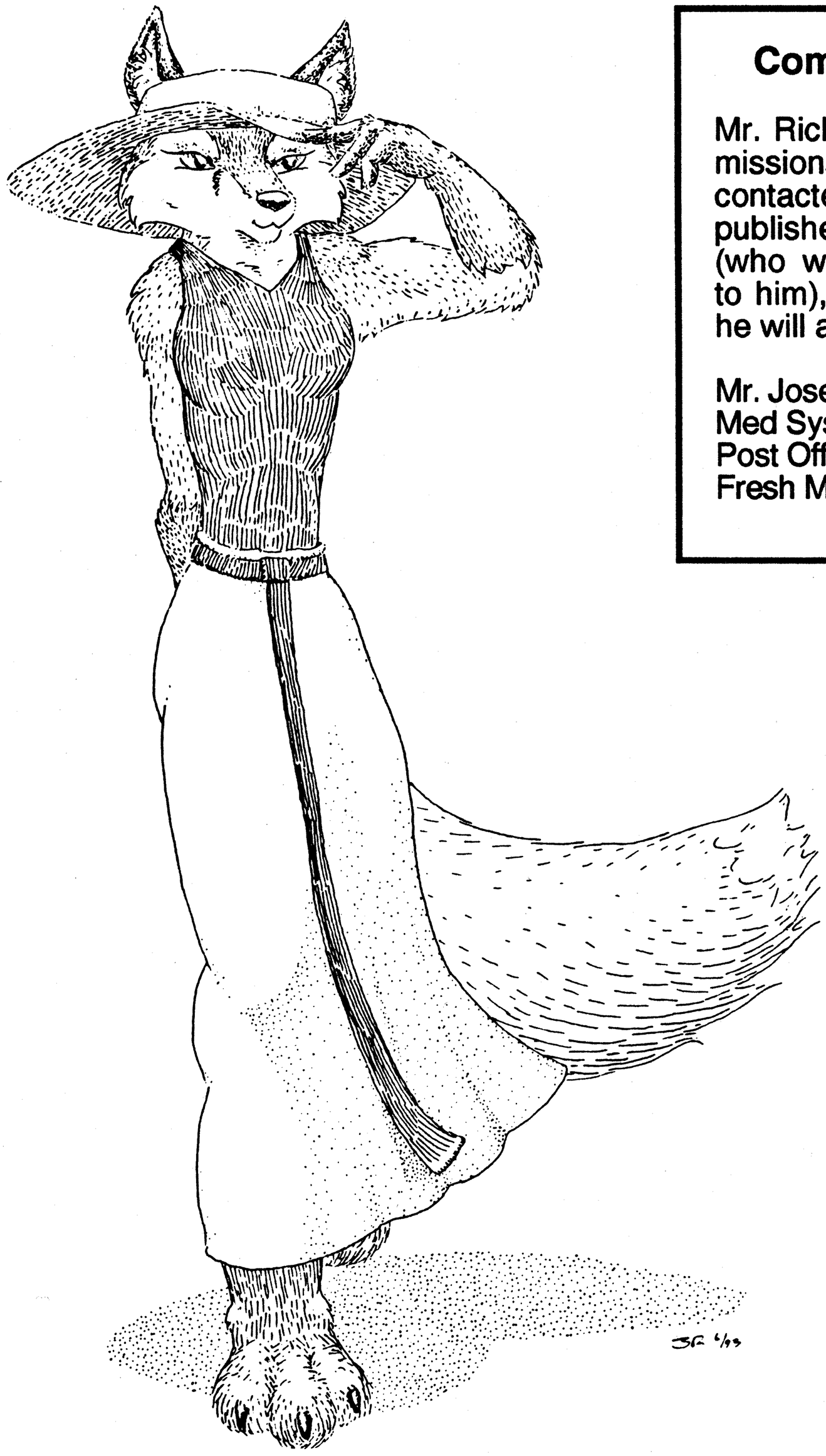
Ooh, Quick! I need more M & Ms!

Women! They may LIKE men, but they LOVE chocolate!

The End!


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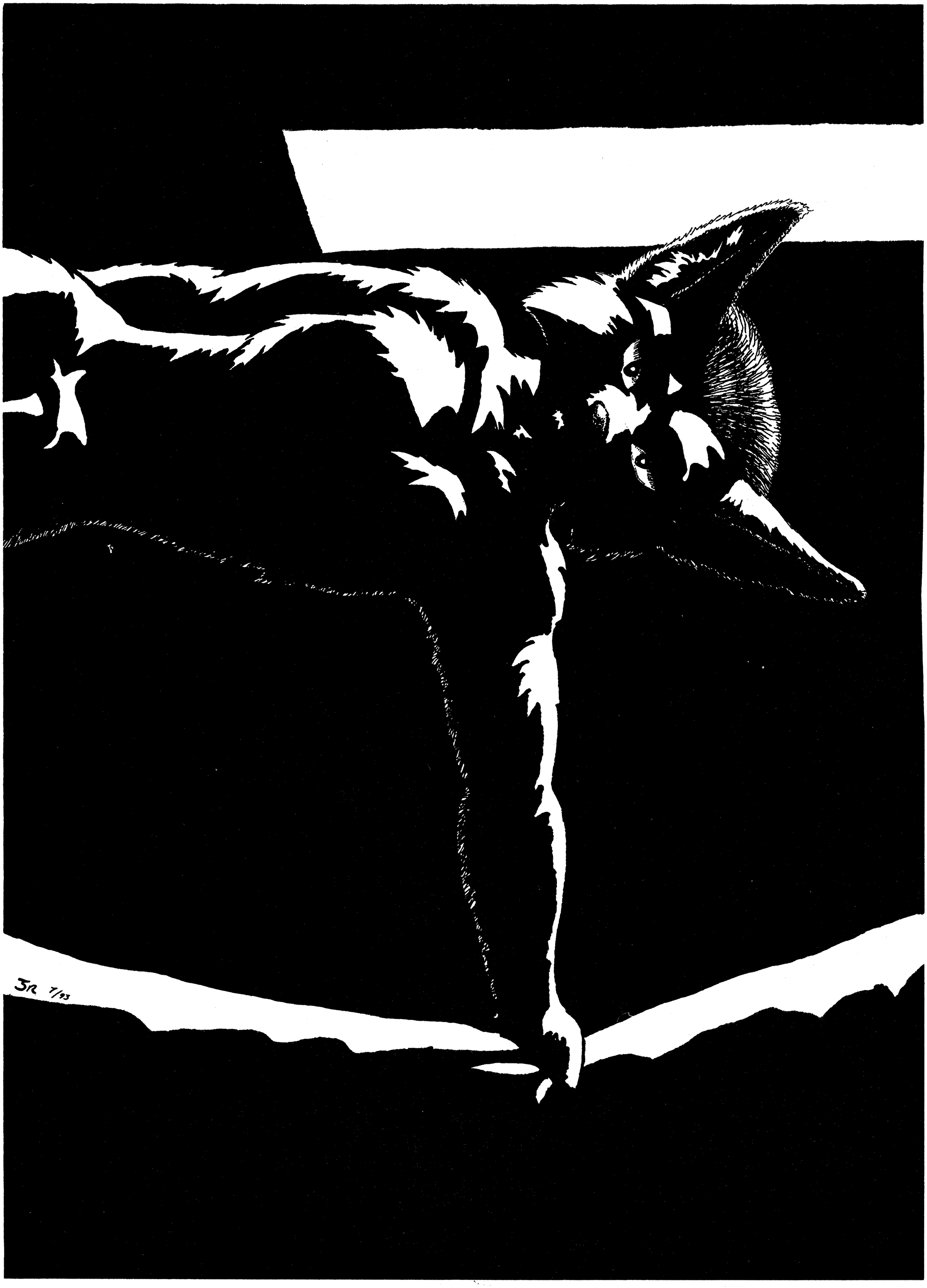
Josef Ricketts



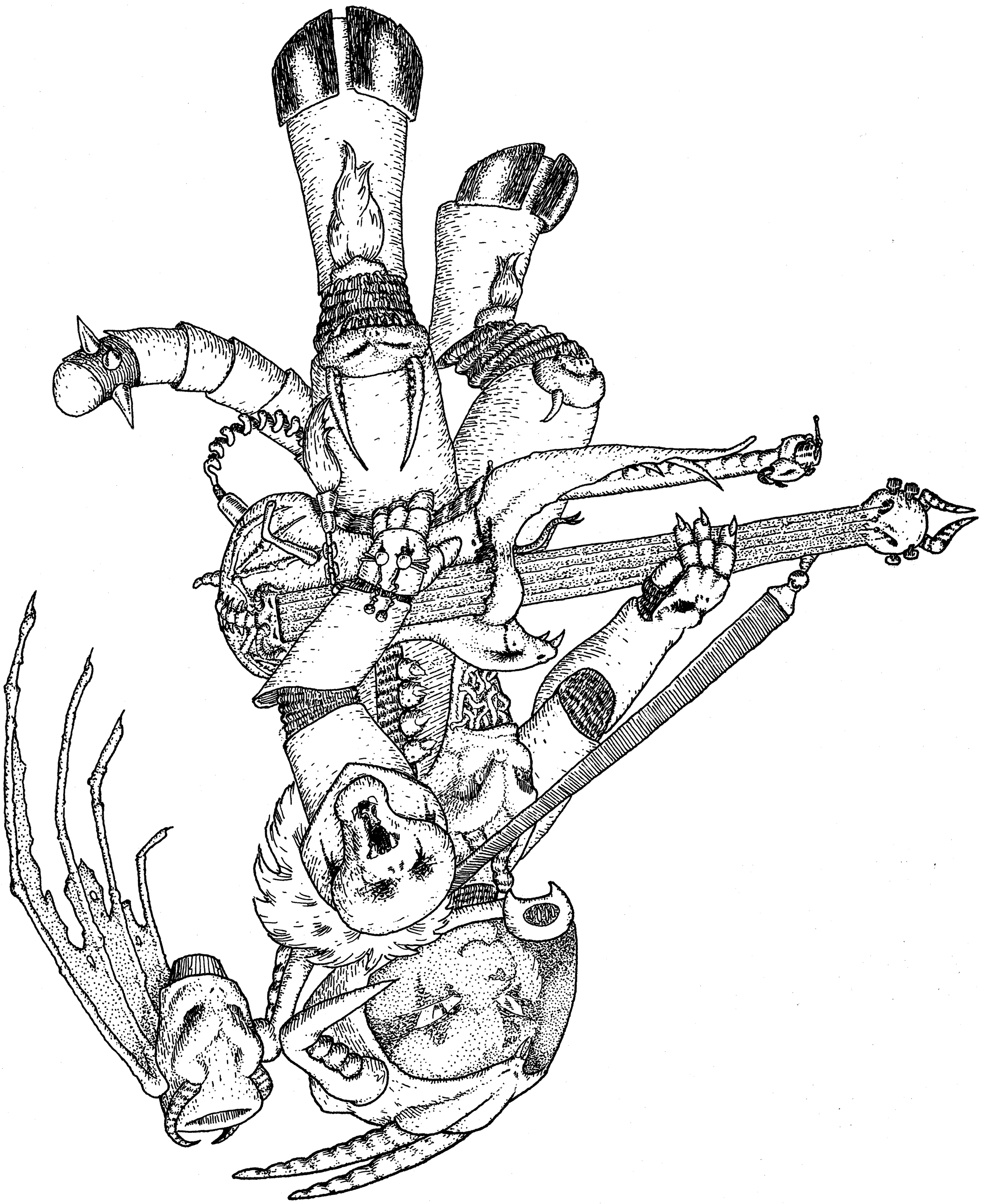
Commissioned Artwork

Mr. Ricketts is not accepting commissions at this time. He may be contacted through writing to the publisher at the address below (who will forward letters received to him), but there is no guarantee he will answer.

Mr. Josef Ricketts, Artist
Med Systems Company
Post Office Box 656715
Fresh Meadows, NY 11365


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Dan Flahive

Background

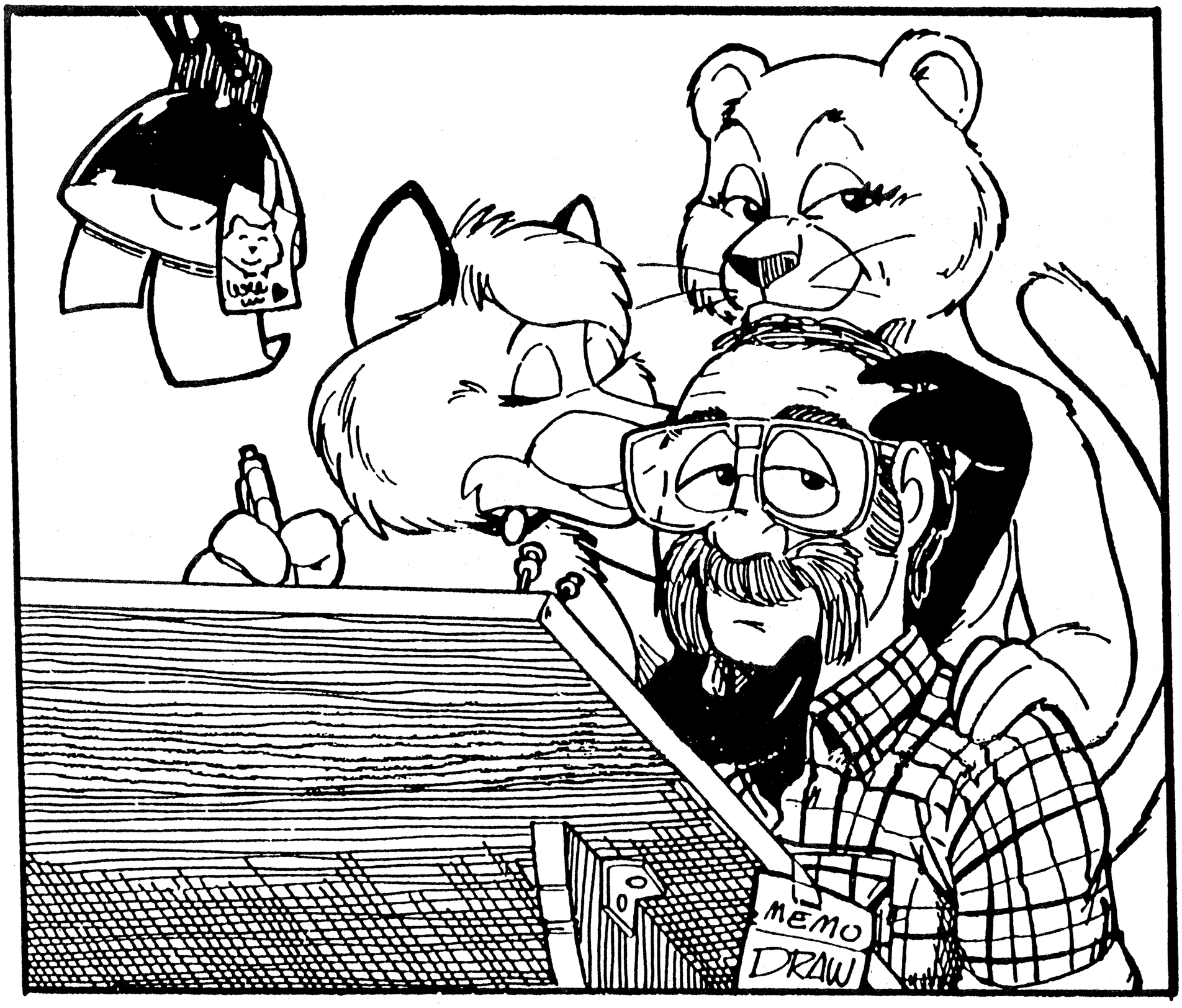
Mr. Flahive is employed at BF Goodrich in Arizona as a technical illustrator. The author and artist of The *Space Wolf* series recently released by Antarctic Press, Dan's popularity has enjoyed a steady growth since his first entrance upon the scene in the mid-80's.

Mr. Flahive's line art (his preferred medium) is bold, clean, clear and consistently high in quality.

Commissioned Artwork

Mr. Flahive sometimes has been known to accept commissions for artwork, but whether or not he will depends on his schedule between his work, projects and family at the time. His prices vary according to the complexity of the request.

Mr. Dan Flahive, Artist
Med Systems Company
Post Office Box 656715
Fresh Meadows, NY 11365













Mark Mandolia

Background

Mr. Mandolia has been in the background of anthropormorphic genre artwork for some time, throughout the Internet and small personal commissioned pieces, but this collection represents his first published work.

His clean line art and concentration to detail will most likely carry him far in the field of illustration.

Commissioned Artwork

Mr. Mandolia is accepting commissions at this time, at the following rates (add $1.50 S&H for each):

8 x 10	Pencil	$ 8.00
8 x 10	Inked	$ 12.00
8 x 10	Color	$ 20.00

Mr. Mark Mandolia
1807 Ivy Oak Square
Reston, VA 22090-4726


XXII
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©'93

WE WERE IN THE PARK, AWAY FROM THE USUAL CROWD, WHEN SHE FINALLY SPOKE HER CALM, MELODIC WORDS.

"SO YOU AREN'T ANGRY NOW? BEING ANGRY YOU WERE BEFORE, ALL GLANCE-HATING, WILLING OR. STAY OR GO, KNOWING?"

IT WAS DIFFICULT TO THINK OF AN ANSWER. AS WARM DAYS GO, THAT ONE WAS HINTING AT A REAL BLAZER, REALLY SOON. THE SHADE CAST BY SPRING GROWTH KEPT ME COOL, LAID AGAINST HER AT THE EDGE OF THE POND LIKE A CUB WORN OUT BY THE AFTERNOON'S PLAY. MAYBE THE SOUND OF NEARBY CONVERSATION, OR THE LIGHT BREEZE OF A FALLING SUN, OR DISTANT TRAFFIC WAS MY DISTRACTION.

THEN I FELT THAT IT WAS HER. VERY LITTLE WAS BETWEEN OUR FUR; MY SHIRT, AND THAT FILMY THING SHE ALWAYS WEARS, HER "DATASUIT." IT'S ALWAYS ON HER, A SECOND FELL, SWIMMING, RUNNING, OR WHATEVER IS PURSUED AT THE TIME. THROUGH IT I COULD FEEL A CALM, STEADY BREATH, AWAITING AN ANSWER.

MY RESPONSE: "I CAN'T HELP BUT WANT TO BE CLOSER THAN FRIENDS. IF YOU DON'T WANT TO, THEN WE WON'T BE."

"SILLY!" SHE PATTED MY CHESTFUR LIGHTLY, "WILL, BUT WHEN THEY, THE OTHERS ME, KNOW. *THEN* WE."

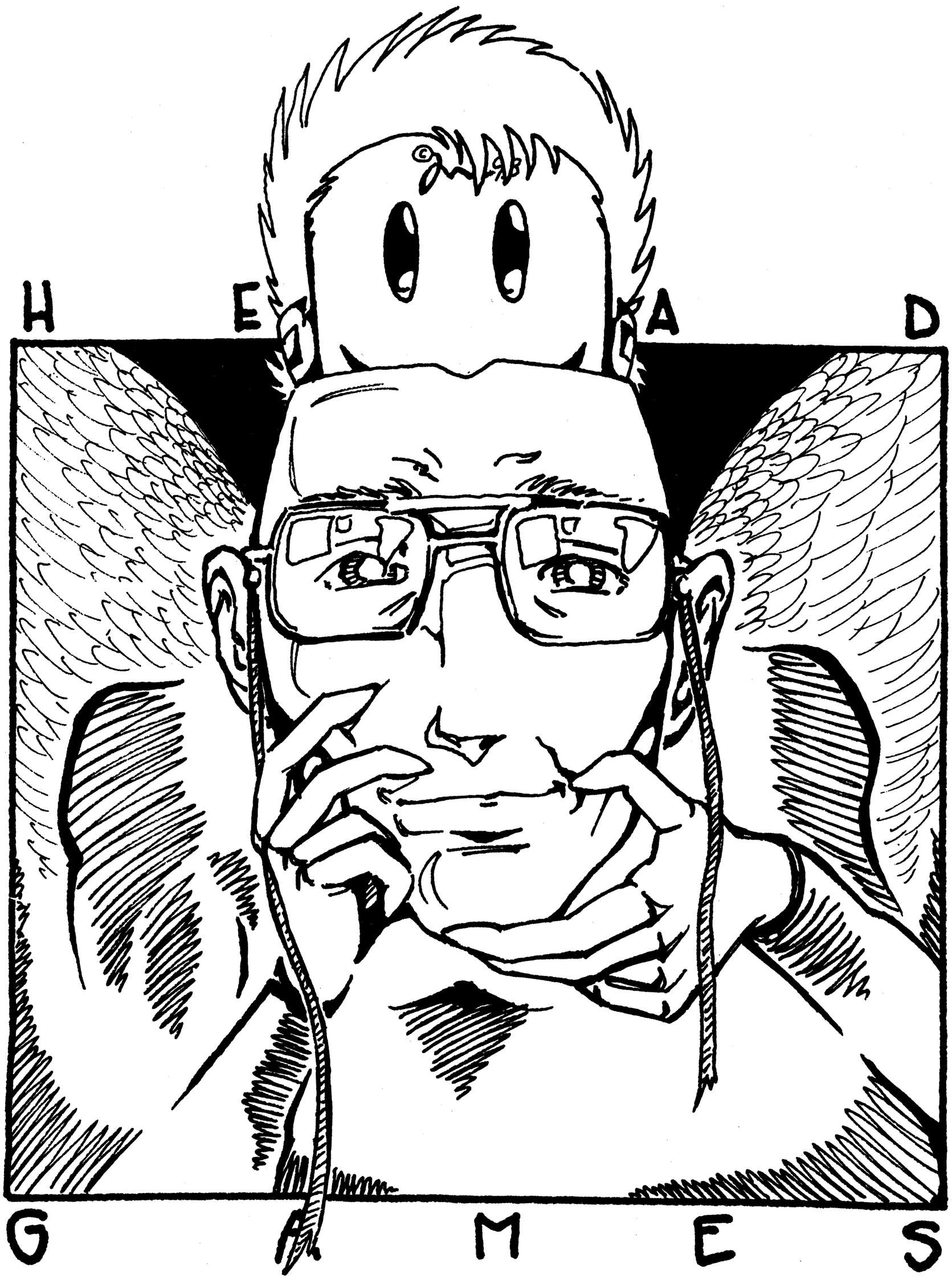
SHE LIGHTLY SPOKE, "TIME", TWICE.

SO IT'S TIME TO WAIT, AND GAZE ACROSS THE WATERS, TO THE PROMISE OF A FURTHER DAY. WHEN SHE MEETS, AND THEY DECIDE IF I AM WORTHY. FOR I WOULD LOVE HER FOREVER, BUT DO I LOVE HER BEST?

©

A WALK IN THE PARK.




H E A D
G M E S



UR-TESSA ©1993

Michael-Scot McMurry

Background

Mr. McMurry has been drawing anthropomorphic characters from the very start of his journey into the field of illustration, but until he met Jim Groat (artist of Red Shetland), he did not know that anyone else was interested. Now, his work can be found in many APAs, genre publications and fanzines across the country. He can be seen at many conferences on the Western Seaboard, and especially the annual *ConFurence* in Costa Mesa.

Commissioned Artwork

Mr. McMurry welcomes all correspondence from interested folks and accepts commissions for artwork, ranging from single-character pencils to full-blown colored pieces with backgrounds, prices from $5 to $75, depending on the complexity of the piece.

Mr. Michael-Scot McMurry
AZART Studio
7414 East Moreland Street
Scottsdale, AZ 85257-4038






"INTERRUPTED PICNIC"

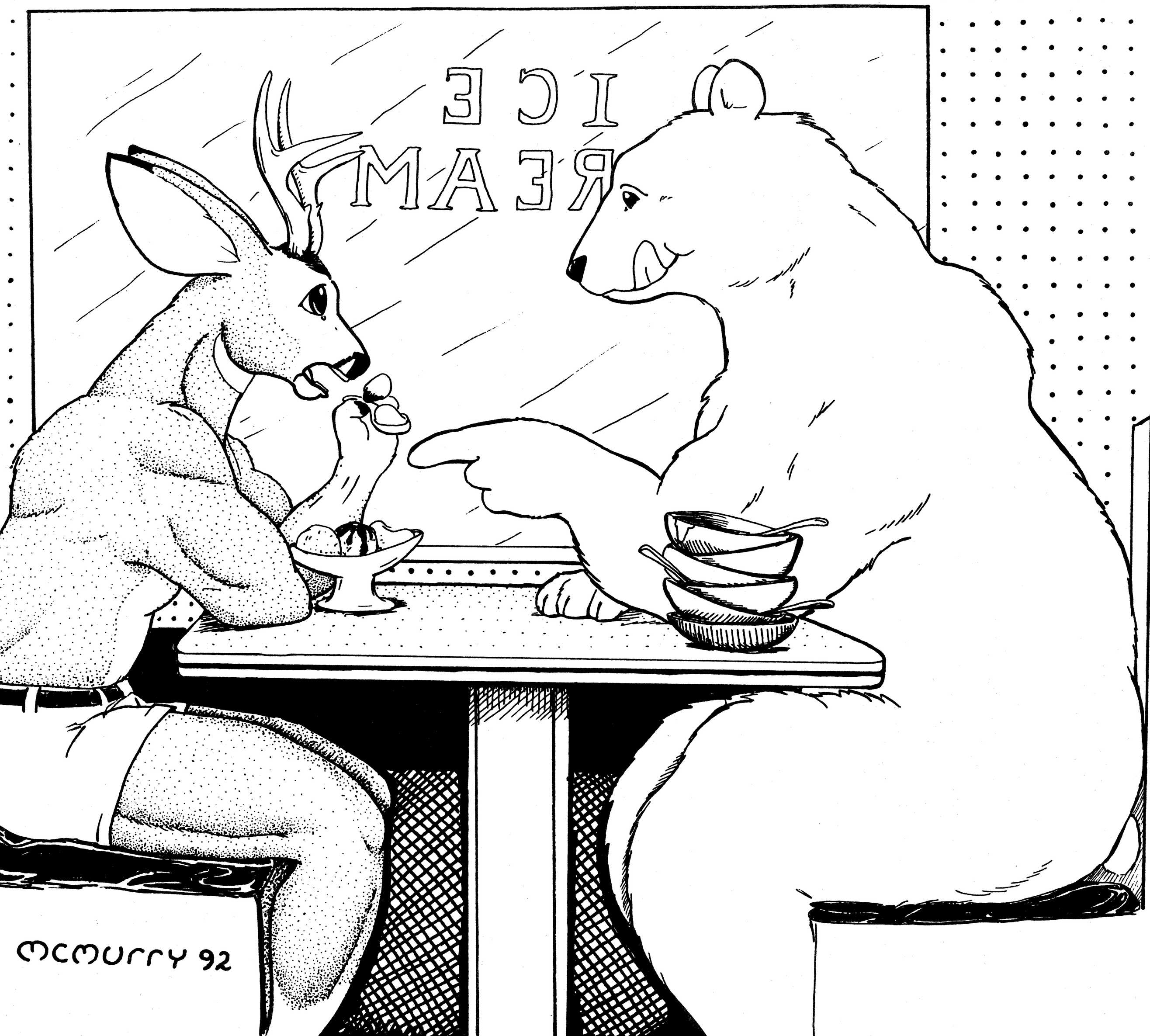


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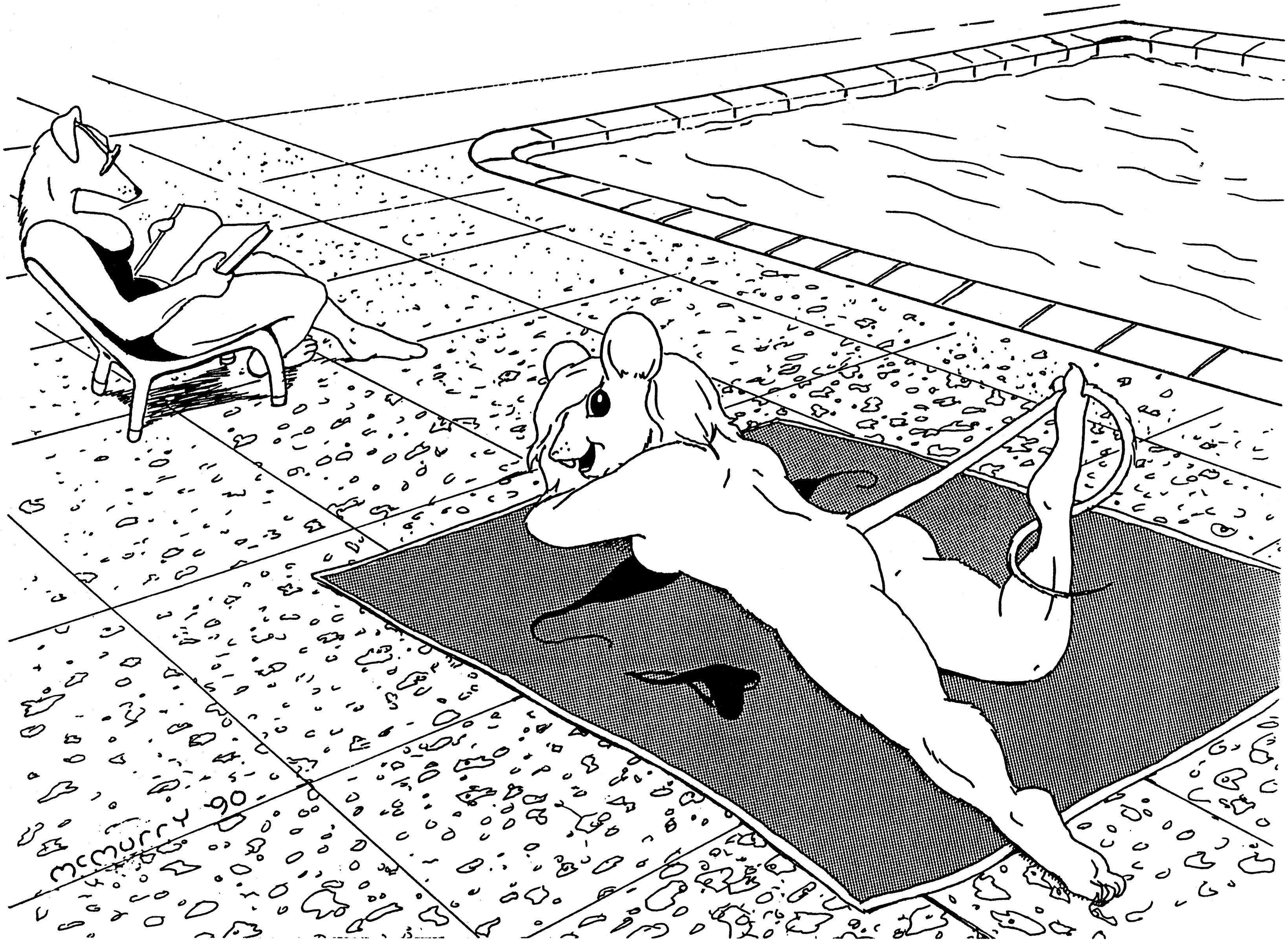


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"ARE YOU GOING TO FINISH THAT?"



MCMURRY 92


mcmurry 90

Ruben Rodriguez

Background

Mr. Rodriguez writes and puts out the minicomic FIBS (Furries in Battle Suits), a continuing story in a post-apocalypse world where the animals have evolved into the dominant lifeform. His artwork, one will note, has strong Manga/Anime influences.

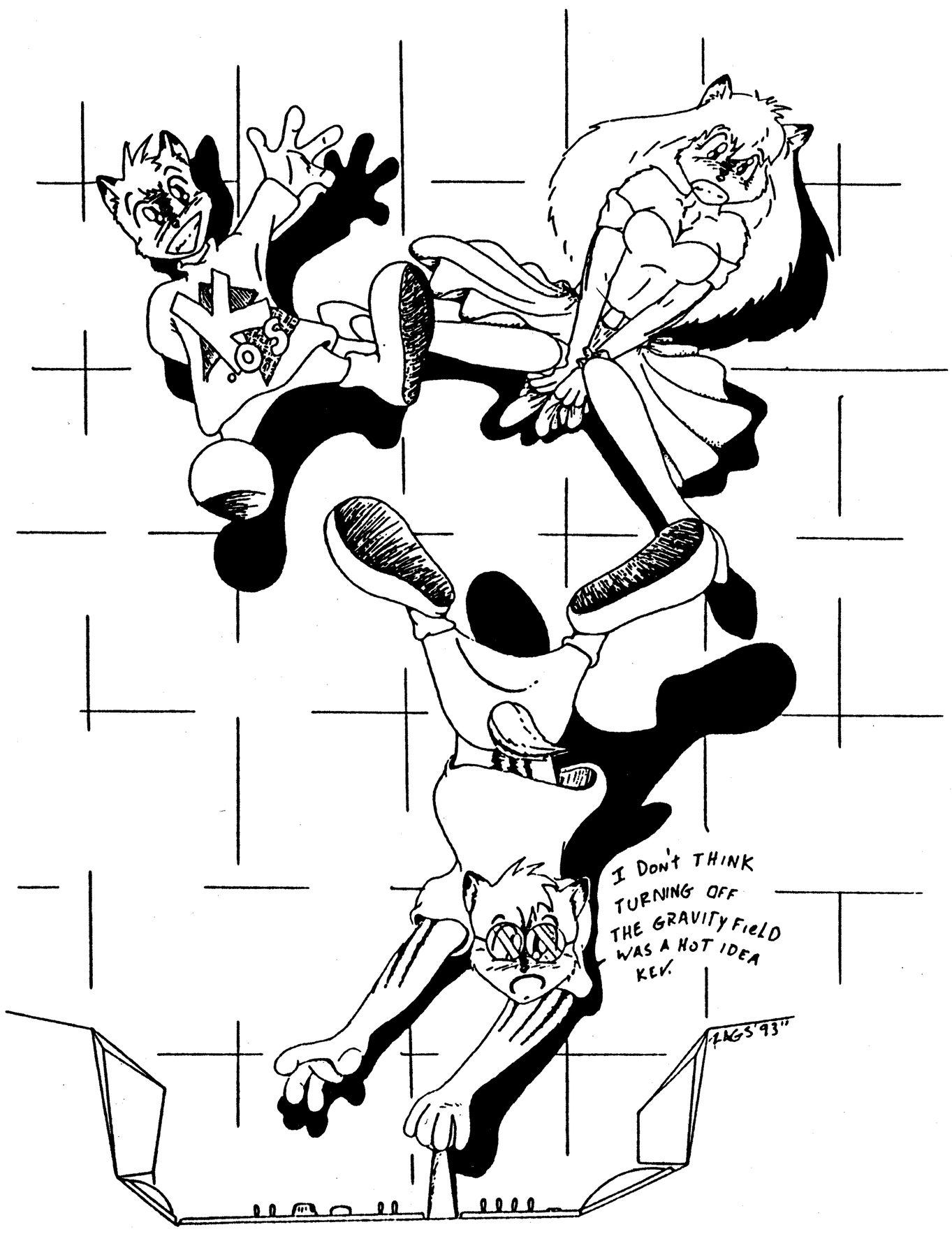
Mr. Rodriguez attends as many conventions as he can, and will be seen at PhilCon and ConFurence.

Commissioned Artwork

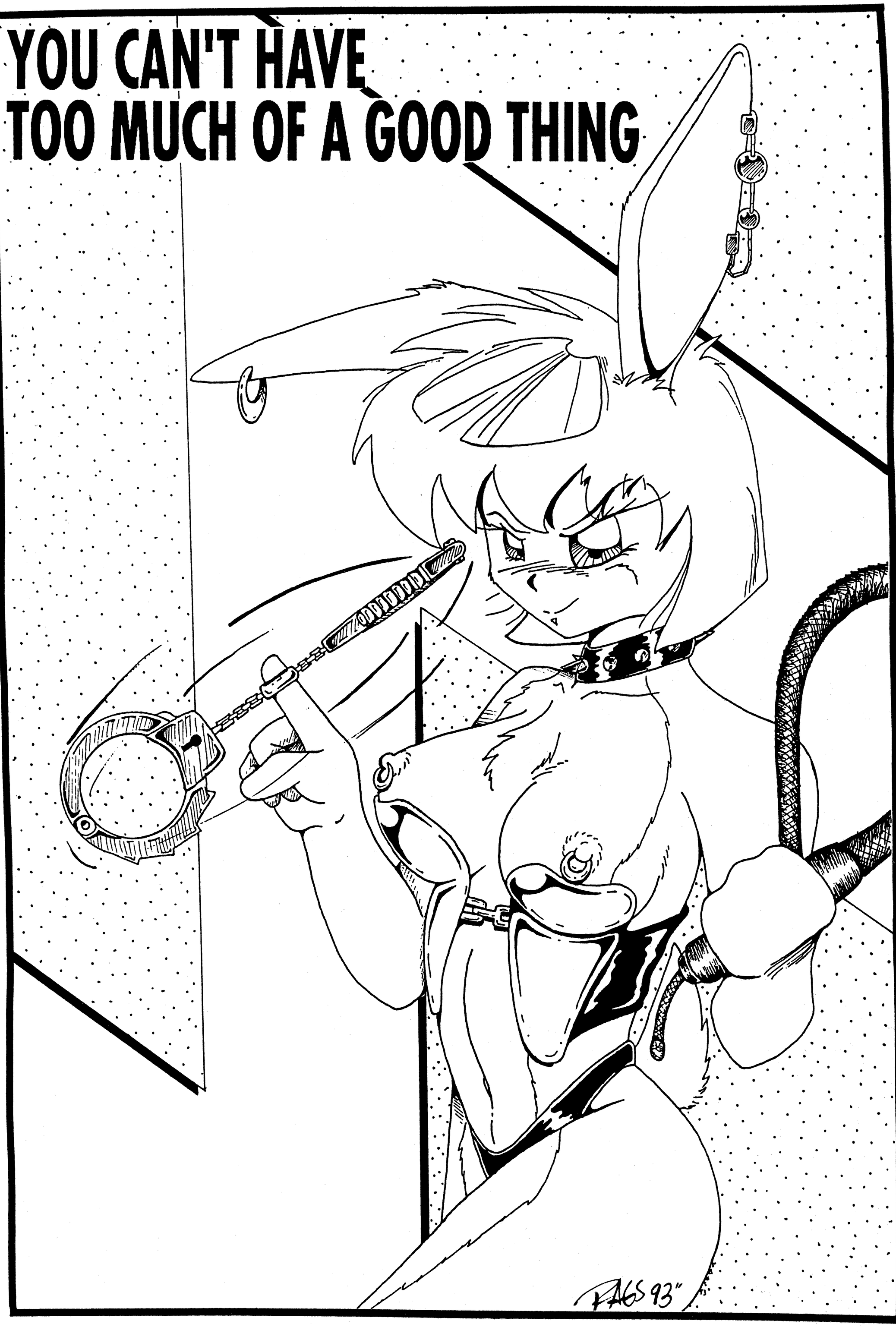
Mr. Rodriguez is accepting commissioned work. His rates vary, depending on the complexity of the piece in question.

He also sells copies of FIBS, his publication. Contact him for more details.

Mr. Ruben Rodriguez
7 Prince Street Place
Salem, MA 01970

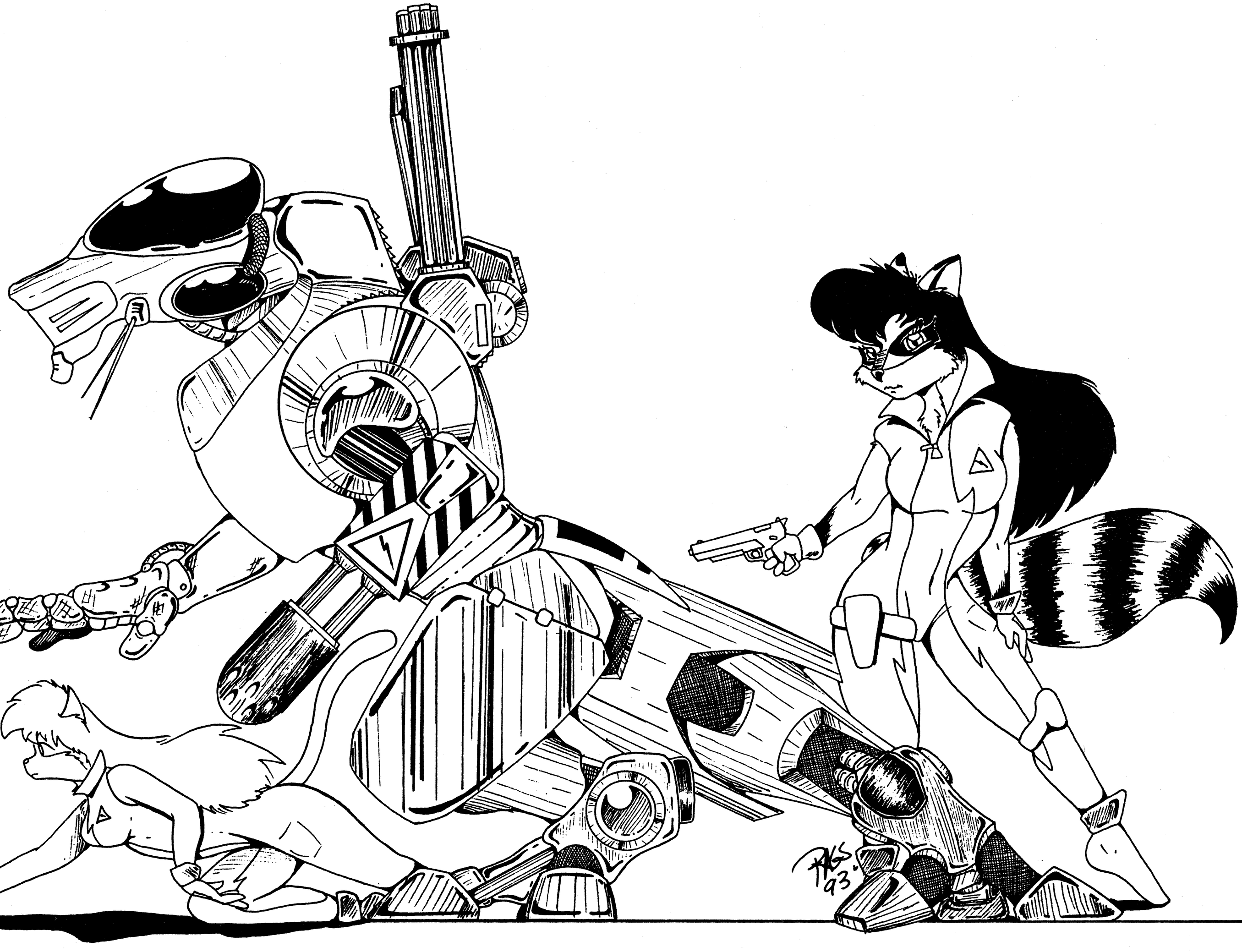


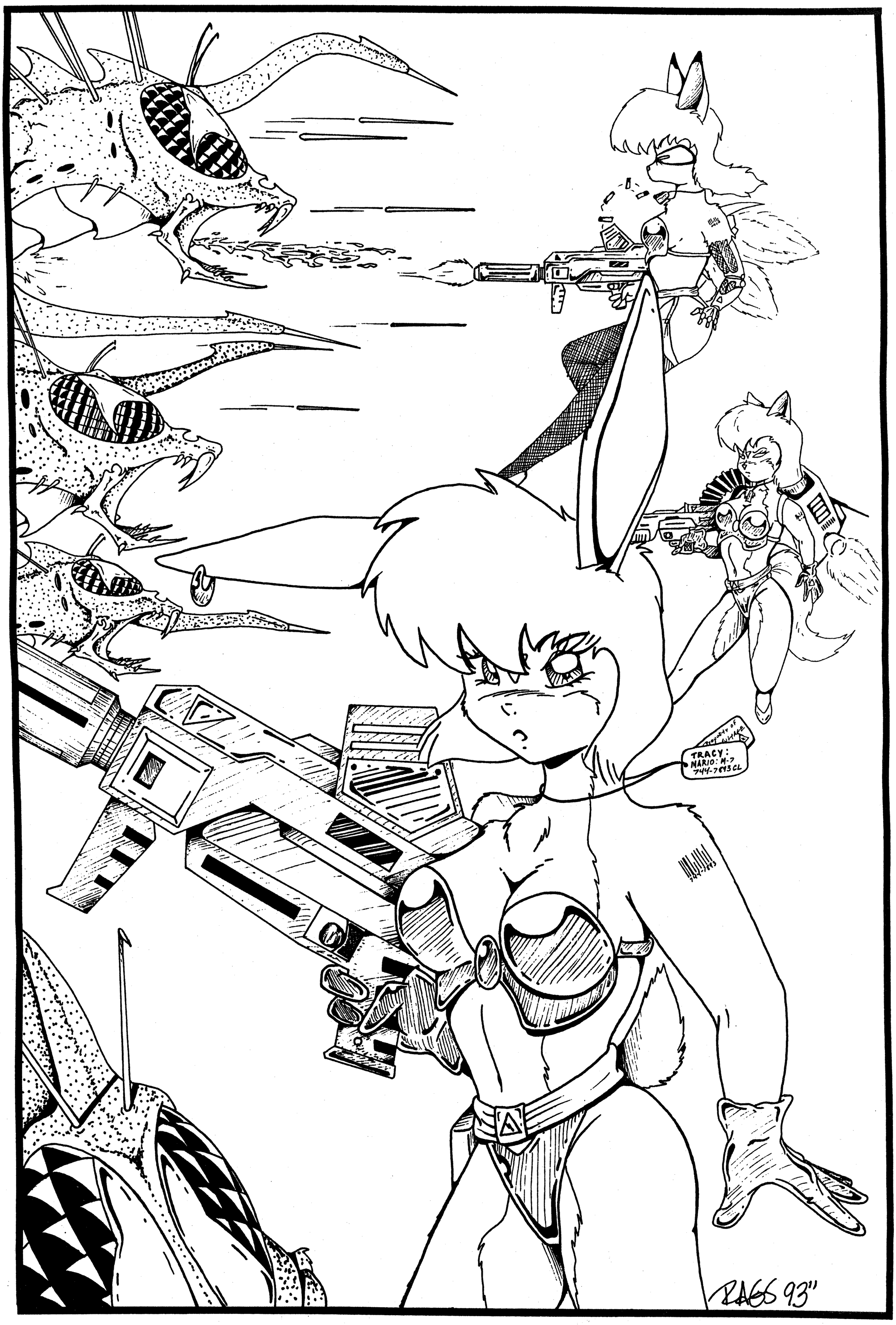
YOU CAN'T HAVE TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING




WINDOW CLEANERS INC.
RAGS 93'






TRACY:
MARIO: M-7
744-7893 CL
RAGS 93"

INTERVIEW

With David Sim, Author of Cerebus, Founder of Aardvark-Vanaheim, Inc.
By Darrell Benvenuto, Editor

Cerebus is an Aardvark, a furry character in a human swords-and-sorcery fantasy world. He has been a mercenary, a wizard's apprentice, a thief, a politician and a pope... a story that, in its telling, has spanned almost 17 years and has been called by some "...the best comic book ever written."

Dave Sim began writing and drawing Cerebus back in 1977, near the beginnings of the independent comic book industry. Today he runs Aardvark-Vanaheim, Inc., and is still producing Cerebus.

Dave Sim wrote, inked and drew the first sixty-four issues of the monthly comic all by himself, something most artists today find quite impressive. The secret, he says, lies in treating it like a job. One gets up in the morning, writes and draws. If you can get a page or a page and a half done a day, you can stay on a monthly schedule. His advice to artists and folks who want to come out with new publications and be successful is exactly that. Treat it as a job and work hard. If they have any talent at all it will begin to show up in their work and the reaction to it. They should tell the stories they want to tell and build their audience one at a time rather than wondering what approach would have the best impact and going for that.

Cerebus is known for its many, many parodies and tongue-in-cheek humor, especially of characters from other major comic book publishers. When asked if his outrageous parodies ever drew complaints or worse yet, lawsuits from the publishers, he said no. Marvel once sent him a warning letter when one of his characters, *Wolverroach*, appeared on three consecutive covers patterned after Frank Miller's Wolverine series. As long as you keep your parodies off the covers, he says, there are usually no problems. It's not as if anyone at the Big Two actually reads comic books.

Dave Sim reprints the Cerebus series in phonebook-sized volumes, as listed below. If you want to catch up on the story, this is the best way to do it. They accept all major credit cards. The amounts listed below are in Canadian funds. The company will bill you the equivalent amount at the current rate of exchange.

After reading Cerebus, we cannot recommend it too highly. Go pick up a copy today at your local comic book store or order the reprint volumes.

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Tall Tails

Anthropomorphics With Attitude

Publication Review

TALL TAILS

By Jose Calderon and Daphne Lage
Published by Golden Realm Unlimited, Inc., FDR Station, P.O. Box 671, New York, NY 10150

Tall Tails is set in a medieval fantasy world, with Knights, Kings, Thieves, Wizards and clashes between good and evil. It's a rollicking good tale, and a great read. One of the first things one notices is the heavy graphic density of Ms. Lage's work. Each panel is filled with detail, providing a rich tapestry upon which the story unfolds. The sharp contrast of the line art reflects the nature of the characters in the story; for they are harsh and realistic, sometimes callous, even brutal. But it is a harsh world they live in, and Ms. Lage does not pull her punches in revealing it to us. The story centers around E. F. Ravenwood, a fox, one of the last few Knights of the Order of Kreston left alive. He and his party of adventurers are on a great quest, and face many dangers along the way. The story is not at all predictable and leads the reader at times down new and interesting paths. Highly recommended to everyone.

Available through your local comic shop! If they don't have it, tell them to order it through their distributor. Or you can order them directly through GRU at the address above.

REVELATIONS

By Jose Calderon, Les Denis, Matthew Lunsford, Gerald Bartley, Xahc and Daphne Lage.
Published by Golden Realm Unlimited, Inc., FDR Station, P.O. Box 671, New York, NY 10150

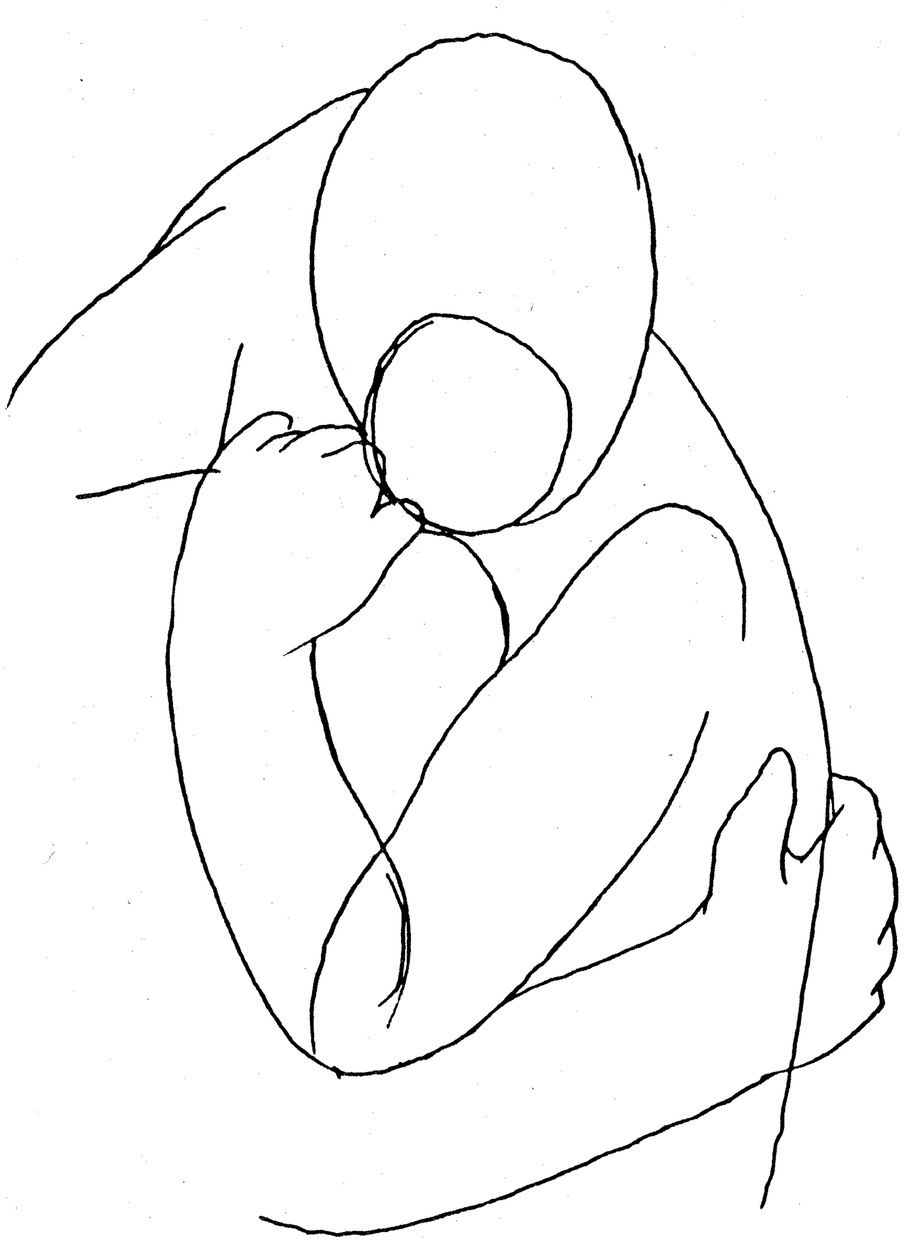
This book is an anthology, a composite of several stories that run simultaneously by different authors. *BioHazrd-X, Cekurity Agenda, Dream Weavers, Reever* and *Tall Tails* are the pieces in Issue #1. The stories range in subject from the superhero-genre universe, one in which genetically enhanced humans and cyborgs are attempting to flee the government which created them, another in which paranormal conflict is covered from a new and refreshingly unique perspective; that of the normal humans who fight next to them. The genre shifts to a demon-takeover conflict underneath the ruined streets of a city and then finishes up with an installment of Daphne Lage's Tall Tails. The book uses a fairly fine halftoning to produce delicate shading effects in its pieces.

The piece leaves you wanting more... but don't worry, more issues are coming! Recommended! Available through your local comic shop! If they don't have it, tell them to order it through their distributor. Or you can order them directly through GRU at the address above.

ARTIST'S CORNER

STEP 1: I VERY LIGHTLY PUT DOWN IN PENCIL THE BASE FORMS OF THE CHARACTERS I WANT.

(MY PENCILS ARE INKED HERE FOR REPRODUCTION PURPOSES.)



STEP 2: ROUGHLY SKETCH IN FACE BASELINES, HAIR TYPE, CLOTHING AND WHATEVER KIND OF EARS THEY HAVE.



STEP 3: NOW I SKETCH IN THE FACIAL EXPRESSION. TO ME THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS AS THIS SETS THE MOOD OF THE ILLUSTRATION.



UP TO THIS POINT MY CHARACTER MIGHT HAVE BEEN CRYING ON HER PARTNERS SHOULDER OR EVEN SLEEPING. (SHE'S DEFINATELY NOT.)

ARTIST'S CORNER

STEP 4: NOW I USE A SOFT PENCIL, DARKENING ONLY THOSE LINES I WILL BE INKING.



STEP 5: NOW I INK OVER MY PENCIL LINES. THEN I'LL BEGIN TO ADD DETAILS LIKE EYELASHES AND BUTTONS.





STEP 5: HERE IS WHERE THE MORE PROFICIENT ARTIST WOULD ADD ZIPATONE OR A WASH. SINCE I'M NEW TO BOTH THOSE SKILLS I'VE STUCK TO BRIEF CONTOURING AND ADDING HAIR TEXTURE.

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Tall Tails

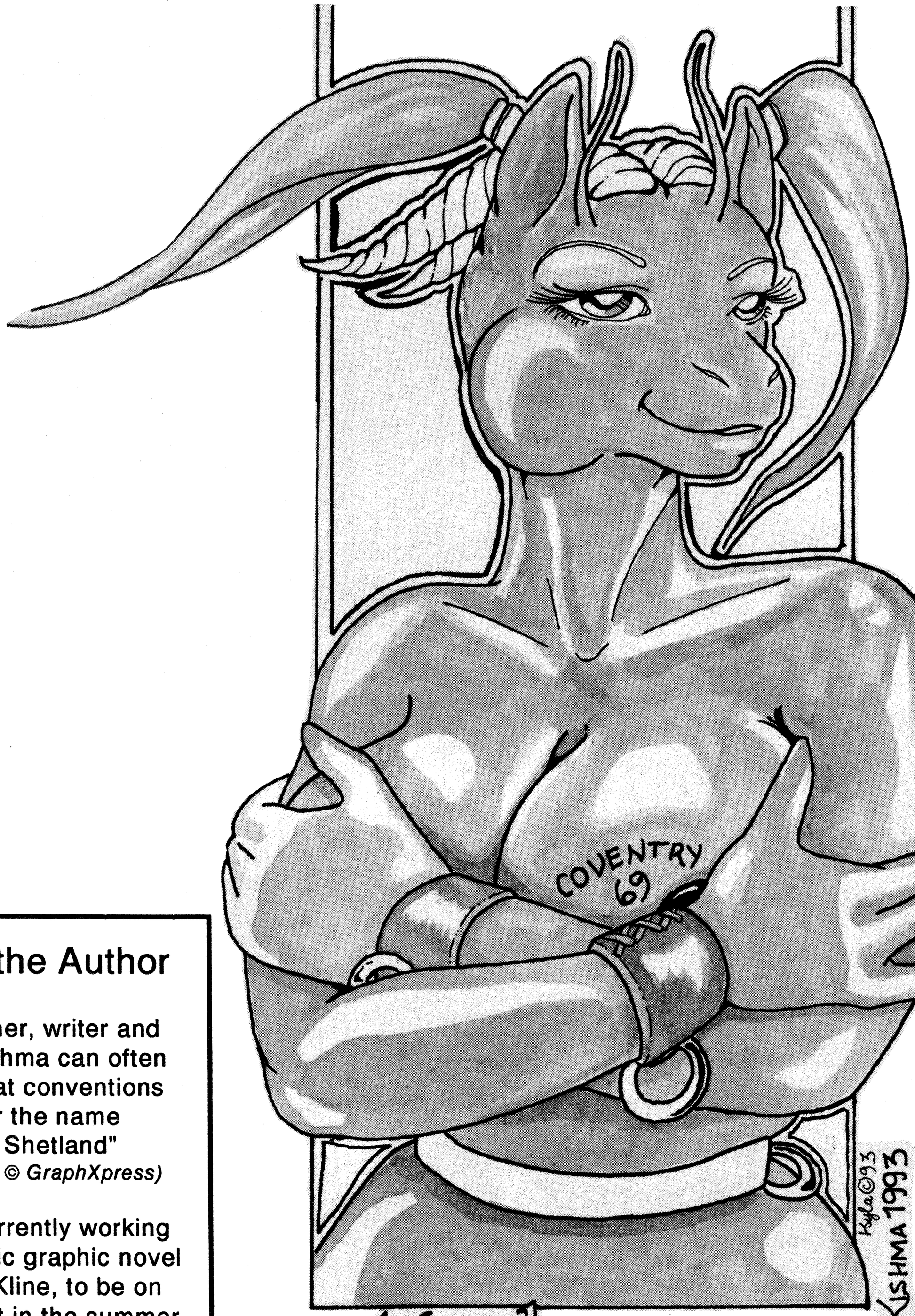
Anthropomorphics With Attitude

About the Author

A costumer, writer and artist, Kishma can often be seen at conventions under the name "Red Shetland"
(Character © GraphXpress)

She is currently working on an erotic graphic novel with Ed Kline, to be on the market in the summer of 1994.

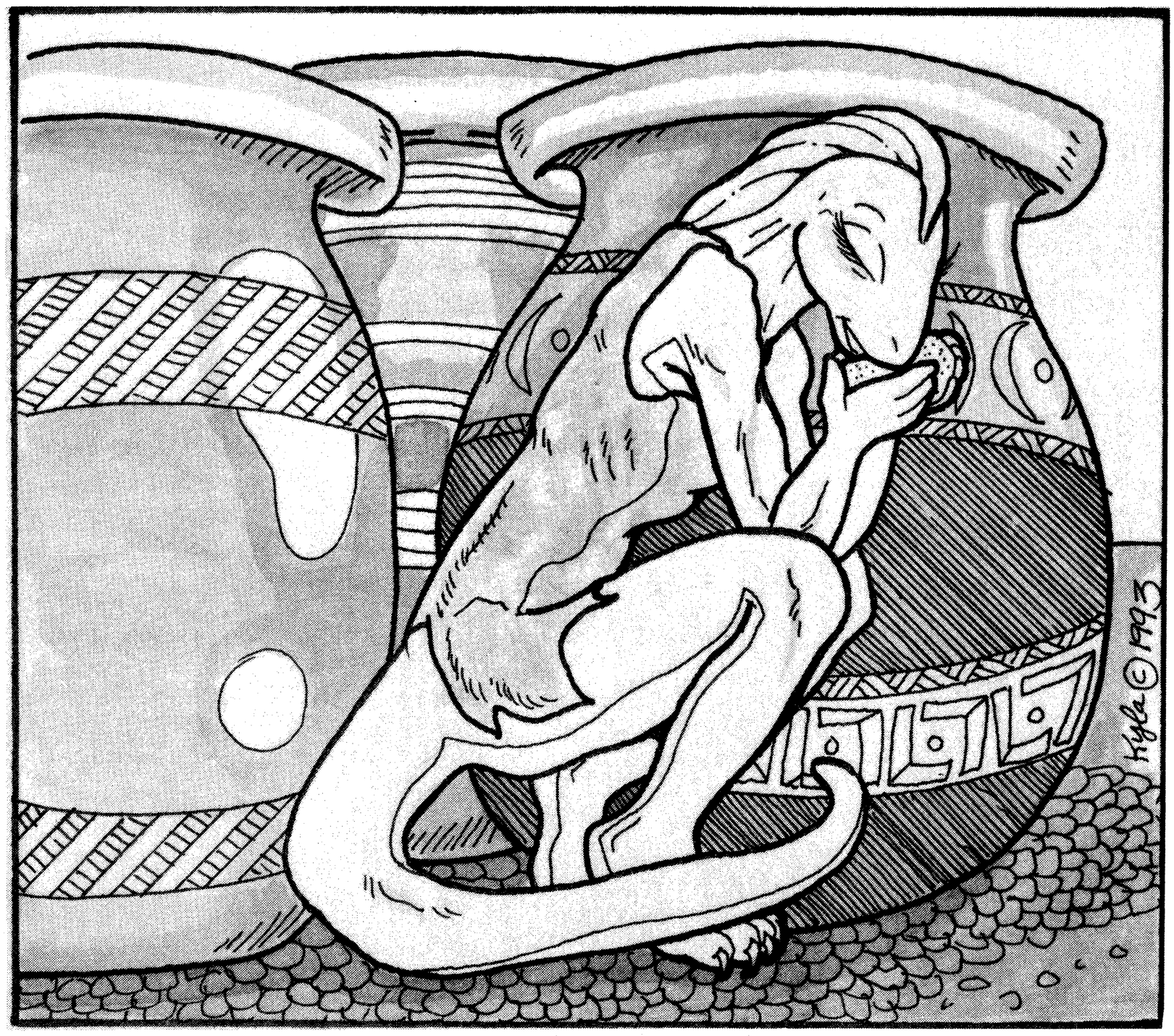
She is also working on several portfolios in concert with the artist Kyla Littlejohn.



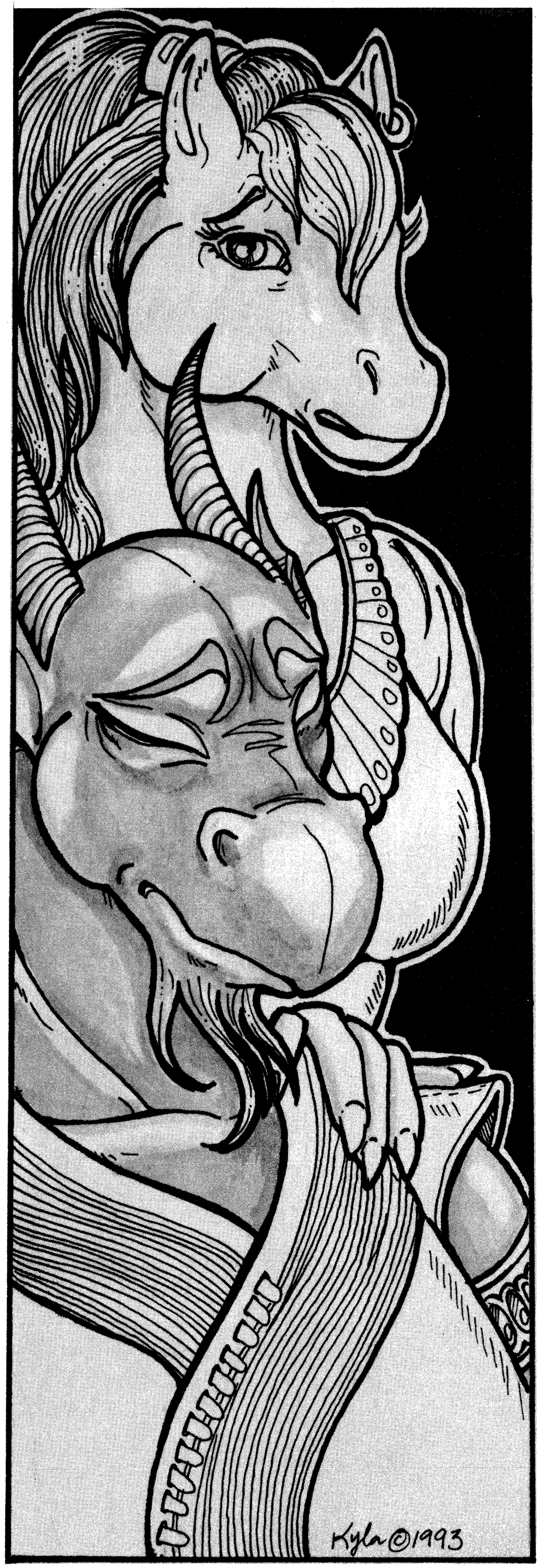
Peacock

by Kishma Danielle

The dragon sheik had ridden through his cities for many days, looking upon the riches his rule had brought. Even the poor had begun to see the wisdom of his ways. He was tired now, simply riding as a source of distraction. A sudden movement caught his eye. A young female fanned lizard was fighting viciously with a baker for a small loaf of bread. She was incredibly slender. Her pale face looked all the smaller for the size of her eyes, huge and dark with dark rings under them. Something drew him to her. Some instinct. He saw the baker raise his great ursine paw to strike her and called out "STOP!" Everyone turned and gasped, seeing their lord, going to their knees. But the child did not. She ran. And how she ran! With speed and grace that made his heart catch. His eyes widened. "Could she possibly be..." He heeled his horse and was after her in an instant. She bobbed and dodged with such speed he laughed. But he could see that she was tired. Hungry. Only her fear kept her running. He constantly called out to her, "Stop, child! I will not harm thee!" But still she ran. He motioned to his men to follow as he circled around, for he felt he knew where she would come out from the tightly gathered buildings. Dismounting, he spanked his mount to return to his men. It did so from years of training. As he crept quietly through the buildings, he caught a flash of white. He stopped and watched it. The child had settled down between two great pots and was eating the bread, as if it were the greatest treasure in the world, taking small, delicate bites which she slitted her eyes to in great enjoyment. He slowly crept up towards her in a crouch. When he was within a few feet of her he began to whistle. A sweet musical tune. Her head rose on its long delicate neck and she listened. He continued to whistle. Her eyes grew larger, if that was possible, and, slowly, he rose. She gasped and stood, trapped between the pots, desperately looking to escape. He smiled, shaking his head gently and held his hand out to her. She stared in fear. He put out both hands and showed her his upraised palms. She only stared, clutching her bread as if he would steal it from her. There was a sudden movement from the other end of the alleyway. The sheik raised his hand silently, his eyes never leaving the child's. His men withdrew quietly and watched. He continued to whistle a mysterious melody and left his hand outstretched. She slowly took a step forward and his whistle turned into a hum. Quietly she took a step forward and also began to hum, a soft, light sound, joining his. It was suddenly broken by a hacking cough as she collapsed, grasping both her chest and the bread as if her life depended on it. He was instantly upon her, catching her tiny body before it could land on the rough, cobbled ground. She continued to cough wracking coughs. Holding the child in his arms, he ran to his horse. He held the child out to his most trusted soldier, a great black panther and had him hold her a moment as he removed his outer silk robe and wrapped her in it. Then he mounted his horse and took the child from the soldier, immediately moving, reigning his horse roughly, with urgency back to the palace. "Follow!" his voice rumbled as he ordered, riding off quickly.



"If she is as I believe her to be she must be saved!" he said to himself as he



Peacock

rode desperately towards the palace. He arrived and was jumping off his horse before it has stopped moving, calling out orders to his servants. "The Palace Healers! I want them in my personal chambers NOW!" he bellowed as he ran up the great stairs. The child lay silent and unmoving, her eyes closed, still grasping the little loaf of bread tightly in her tiny claws. She began to moan lightly at the jerking movement of his rapid climbing of the stairs. "Quiet child. You are safe. You are with me. Safe." he murmured as he threw open his chamber doors. "A hot bath, now!" he ordered. As the great tub began to fill with steamy water, he gently lay the child down on his great bed, caring naught that the grime that covered her would irreparably stain the fabric. He carefully disrobed her and looked upon her tiny, emaciated body. Dull white scales covered her like silk, with multicolored stripes across her arms, legs and back, fading as they twisted around to the front of her body. Quickly he disrobed and picked her up in his arms, stepping into the steaming waters of the tub. She moaned as her body was immersed. "Quiet little one. It is safe you are now. No one can hurt you here." he murmured.

"I dream" she thought. Her simple mind could think nothing else. Warmth filling her, warmth unlike any she had ever felt. She felt hands caressing and rubbing her, relaxing her. The warmth faded for a moment and the returned as she felt great hands lift her and wrap her in large, soft towels. Enfolding her in great arms. She sighed deeply and slept.

The dragon sheik paced his great room, watching and waiting. His healers were the best in all of this part of the conquered lands. If she could be saved, they could do it. They must do it. He watched them constantly humming incantations over her and softly feeding her medicinals. He often fed these to her himself. Sitting quietly and holding her tiny hand. Days passed. He did not sleep. Often one of his wives would try to distract him away, trying to make him rest. They would parade in front of him, exquisitely dressed and perfumed. Beautiful. He would look up blindly, not seeing them and softly order them away. His number one wife would sit for hours behind him, simply watching. If he needed anything during this time, it was she who was there, quiet and patient. She was a beautiful royal arabian, heavy breasted and full of figure from many childbirths. She stood, constant. Rubbed his tired shoulders when they slumped. Brought him teas to remain awake when his other wives would try and distract him away, trying to make him rest. She stood opposite him one evening, looking down at the child. "She can be no more than twelve years of age, my lord" she murmured quietly. He looked up at his favorite wife and smiled a sad smile. "Yes my love. I know this." She stared at the slight figure and then back up to her husband. "I have never seen

you act so. She is tiny and scrawny, my lord. What draws you to her?" He looked at her, and through her as he answered, in his mind the memory of the child running and darting through the streets. "I watched her move..." In his voice was the wonder of someone seeing something that could not be described. Her heart clenched for a painful moment, and she looked back at the child and her husband. Already it had happened. His heart had been captured. She had heard of such beings. Rare and short of life. And almost never beautiful. She looked back at the slumbering form. Her figure was nonexistent. But then, she was a child. Bony and unformed. Her eyes too large for her face. She sighed heavily, returning to sit patiently behind her husband. Quietly, hesitantly, she spoke. "She is a... Peacock, is she not?" He did not turn, but his aged head drooped. "Yes my wife. She is a Peacock. And if she survives, she is mine."

Peacocks are only legend. Myth. It is said that every hundred years, there are those special chosen few who are born with a gift. The gift of the Asian Peacock. Most of those born with the gift are not beautiful. And weak. And short lived. But when they move, all ugliness fades. And if they are beautiful... it is said that entire civilizations have fallen over the desire for a single Peacock... but, that is legend.

The child survived. Barely. Her illness was so progressed, it took months to bring her to the state where she could simply walk by herself. She suffered from coughs that would cause her to collapse and remain bedridden for days. Through it all, the dragon remained with her. Helping her. Supporting her. Telling her how beautiful she was and constantly reassuring her that she was indeed truly safe. She idolized him. Her hero. He had saved her from death. He had saved her from the cold. For she was never cold any more. He was always there to keep her warm. When she had shivered, in the beginning, he had exquisite embroidered robes made for her, light as air, so as not to burden her movements. Then, eventually, she was fully recovered. He knew that day. He would never forget it. For she had laughed. He remembered only the laughter. It sprang, like a musical, bubbling brook from her throat.

That night he told her he had a surprise for her. "A surprise? For me? What need have I of surprises? You give me all I wish for... and more." He smiled. "Come with me." With that, he escorted her to a great room where a multitude of musicians sat in silence. She was dressed very simply in a robe tied at the waist. There was a beautiful raised dais in the center of the room and a great throne at the end. She looked curiously at him. He drew her to the dais and had her step up onto it. She waited, curious. He ordered the guards at the door to guard it from the outside and lock it so that no one might enter. It was then that the girl noticed that all of the musicians were faced away from the center of the room. "Now, my musicians. Play for me. Play to make the soul fly..." And they did. They started with sounds no stronger than that of a moth against a window pane. And the music grew. As they slowly played, her eyes opened wide. She stood entranced, listening to the music. He stepped away from her, letting go of her hand and noticing that she was so entranced that her hand remained upraised. Her eyes focused on a place that no one could see, she began to sway back and forth. Then slowly, ever so slowly, she began to move. To dance. She became lost with the music. And became the music in the flesh. She flowed on the dais. Whirling and moving to make the heart ache. She did nothing different from any of his other dancers, and yet, she did. There was that indefinable feeling. As she slowly backed up to his throne and sat, mesmerized, she continued to dance. Her robe seemed to fling itself off of her, as if it knew it was a burden to her moving body. She danced. Spun. Her eyes often closed. Then, suddenly, they would flash open impishly and flirtatious. Her hips rocked to an unseen lover. He gasped as his body responded without hesitation, his heart clenching in the pain one feels when one sees a truly beautiful thing. The musicians played. She danced. And he watched. Slowly the music faded as she slowed and whirled her way down upon the dais, until she was prone. Gasping. He quickly rushed to the dais, taking her into his arms protectively. "My little Peacock." he smiled down at her. "Did you enjoy my gift?" She smiled in return, shyly, gasping. "Yes... ever so much. That was... wonderful. I have dreamed of hearing such music. And now, it is real." He nodded. "For you, little one. Only for you. Now come. You are tired and must rest." She giggled as he lifted her in his arms, carrying her to her rooms. By the time they arrived, she was already deep asleep. He laid her down gently, covering her with the silken sheets. Caressing her cheek, he leaned over her and softly kissed her forehead. "Rest well my Peacock." he said as he quietly left the room.

And so it went. The Peacock danced, happily for the sheik. Loving him with her dance. He never made advances towards her and often, after watching her dance, made passionate love to his wives. They all looked forward to these nights and came to care for the Peacock almost as much as the sheik. Often he would sit up late at night with her, a single huge candle burning to light up the room, save for the stars. And when she danced, one could swear that the stars came down from their places in the sky to dance with her. It was on such a night that the sheik had one of



Peacock

his most favored soldiers come and join him in his room of dance. He was told to remain quiet. And to watch. She came out wearing a single emerald belt around her waist. She stood upon the dais and waited. The sheik gestured to his musicians and they began. She smiled widely, immediately lost in the sounds. She danced. She made love to the air. And left it wanting. Desiring. Filling the room with lust and pleasure. Whirling, twisting and swaying. Her body sang with the music. Their bodies responded. The sheik smiling widely, pleasured himself as he watched her body pleasure his eyes. She would let out small moans of pleasure as if the air became flesh and touched her. The soldier's eyes grew wide and awed. His breathing became ragged as his body, without aid, responded to her movements. Her hands flying as if caressing some unseen lover. Tracing their way down her small round breasts and over her hips and back up beseechingly to the air. As her dance his a crescendo, so did their bodies. She lay panting on the dais, in the candlelit darkness. From the shadows, "Well done, my beautiful Peacock. I cannot move for fear of embarrassing myself, you danced so well this eve." She giggled lightly and pranced gracefully over to him, jumping into his lap unabashedly. Hugging him tightly. Her eyes turned to the soldier sitting in the shadows and she peered at him. "Who him?" she asked. "Look upon him, my sweet. Does he not please your eyes?" She looked at him seriously. His leonine body was well muscled, his mane silky. She smiled at him. "He is pretty." she said simply. "Good. Now," he said, spanking her lightly on her now round fanny, "go and rest. I have a surprise for you this evening." She smiled a dimpled grin at him. Placing a quick kiss upon his cheek. She springs from the room. The sheik turns to look at the soldier. "She is beautiful. Does she not make you ache to take her?" The soldier takes a deep breath before replying. "Yes sir. Never before have I seen something so... so..." The sheik waves his hand in the air, smiling. "I know. I cannot describe it, either. Now, you are to take my sweet Peacock and pleasure her. She has

need of this. I have seen her mooning at night, looking at the city for what, she does not know. I know. She needs to be taken. Softly. Lovingly. In the ways I have had you instructed these many weeks. She is like a flower. Caress her petals carefully. I would do it myself, but I am too old now to provide her with what she needs. You will do it for me." The soldier nods solemnly. "Yes sir."

The next morning, at breakfast, she comes giggling to the sheik and hugs him, sitting next to him and munching on a piece of fruit. "Did you like my gift, sweet one?" She nods happily. "I wished it were you, though, my lord." He grins widely. "As do I, my little one." he murmurs as he caresses her cheek. "But I am too old for you. Take me in your dreams, as I take you." She sighs and nods... then smiles. "I take you in my dance." He gasps lightly, her words giving him a sweet pain in his heart. Then he begins to cough raggedly. Immediately, his attendants are upon him. He sees her worried face and gasps to her, "It is all right, little one. Simply a cold." Her eyes darken as she watches him attended to, his coughs quickly subsiding as if they had never happened.

Years pass. She is given anything she could desire. And all she desires is to dance. For the sheik. Lovers come and go, pleasuring her. Satisfying her body. But her dance, for the sheik, satisfies her soul. They enjoy each other almost as lovers would, without the bond of the body. They have something more. Often they would sit for hours over a chess board. Or with him reading her fairy tales and poetry. Then explaining it if she does not understand. And all through this she notices. His brief, but wracking coughs. His shiny, silken scales turning dull. His walk, still strong, but stiff. The one night, hearing him in his rooms, the sounds of his painful coughing makes her moan in dismay and run to her own rooms, crying on her bed in despair. "He hurts. He should not hurt! Why can they not heal him?!" But she knows the answer. Fate does not work at the whim of mortals. She sits upon her bed, her tears flowing upon the silken sheets. Staining them. Suddenly, her eyes clear, a firm resolve growing within them.

Late that night, she is called. As usual, to dance. She smiles softly and covers her body with a beautifully embroidered red robe. She enters the Room of Dance and waits upon the dais. The room is dark, but for small torches in holders. The musicians begin, an eerie, soft melody filling the air. She begins. Slowly, gracefully, disrobing. Pulling the very shadows towards her with her dance. Making them give up their darkness. She twists, swaying, and makes love to the darkness. She shrieks and makes low, growling moans of pleasure as she increases her tempo... and continues. For hours she dances. Exhausting the sheik. Over and over bringing his body to heights of pleasure, without a touch. Finally she hears him groan in an intense release of pleasure. Then silence. Except for ragged breathing. She slows her dance, gasping, sweat dripping from her body. She rushes over to the unconscious sheik, pulling his belt knife from its sheath. "My lord. My love. My life." she whispers as she caresses his pale, exhausted cheeks. Her tears stream down her face. "With this one brief pain, I will bring you peace." She thrusts true with the blade. He does not move. His blood flows forth and she collapses, sobs wracking her body as she slides from his lap, covered in blood. Her tears mix with the blood as they drip onto the quickly growing pool of crimson. She sobs until she can no longer. Finally, attendants rush into the room, summoned by the musicians. They are too late. She blood soaked body is picked up and hugged tightly. She looks up weakly at the sheik's first wife, who rocks her gently in her arms. "Why, little one?" she asks desperately. The Peacock whispers, "He was in pain. And in pain he would remain. I gave him pleasure. It is how he should leave us. In pleasure." She weeps against the wife's heavy breasts weakly. The first wife rocks her, shaking her head. From the Peacock comes a soft moan of despair. "I cannot dance... it... is... gone. With him." Tears flow from the eyes of the first wife, mingling with the Peacock's. Slowly she notices a glow coming from the pool of blood around her dead husband. Then she notices the same glow around the Peacock in her arms. "Oh, no..." she whispers. "Dragons blood! Fate, do not be so cruel!" But the glow brightens until it is a blue-black fire covering the Peacock, a radiance leading back to the sheik. "NO!" The first wife screamed to the air. "Do not DO this! PLEASE! I BESEECH THEE! DO NOT MAKE HER IMMORTAL! SHE CANNOT DANCE!" The dark blue fire fades, and with it comes the sound of weeping. The fire seems to sigh as it fades, "It.... isssss.... dessstiny...."

The first wife collapses on the floor, rocking the Peacock, as the torches gutter and burn themselves out, and the dawn rises over the distant mountains.

The End
?


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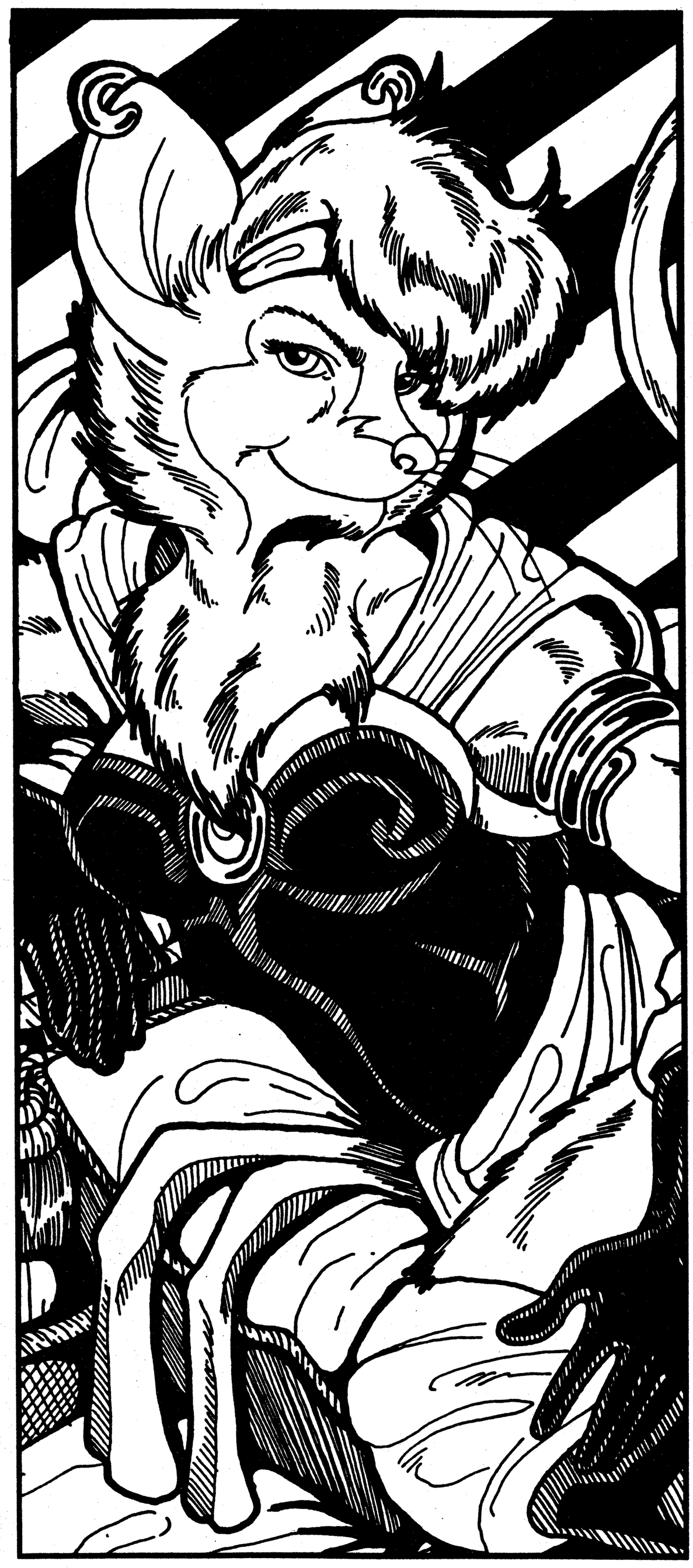
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Tales from the Reservation

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The Reservation lies in the northeastern corner of the continent of Australia, about eighty miles west of Chilagoe, on a fertile section of land purchased from the government by a group of foreign investors many, many years ago. It is ringed all about with 20' tall metal fencing, to keep kangaroos (and others) out. Privately owned and operated by it inhabitants, (who are a little unusual, to say the least), the place is fairly self-sufficient. The Reservation has one road that runs through it, from east to west. Trees cover the rest of the terrain and paths from view above. It is governed by a mayor, who is elected from the populace. They have little formal contact with the outside world, but the isolation of their community is deliberate, as they have suffered much in the past.

* * *

The stick hissed overhead against the darkening sky, lashing out towards his temple. Shem snapped his own stick upwards, deflecting it, then continued the motion, bringing his own stick whipping around and down towards its target, the grinning face of his brother, Marl. His attack was blocked forcefully up and away by Marl's flashing stick. In the brief opening, Marl managed to bring his stick around slap a sound blow home his ribs. As Shem gasped and staggered, Marl took the opportunity to disarm him.

The sun was just setting over the ridge line as Shem reached down with a gloved hand and picked up the practice stick from where it lay in the dirt. He glared across at his older brother Marl and got a smirk in return. It was the third time he had been disarmed in as many minutes. Hefting the piece of padded rattan in one hand, Shem lifted his ears from their position of irritation and stilled his twitching tail. He'd be damned before he gave Marl any more satisfaction. Bowing, he stepped forward into long stick range, left hand against his chest and let loose with a flurry of strikes.

Marl, blocking effortlessly with strikes and checks against Shem's stick and hands, stepped in to close range, reached out and trapped Shem's stick arm for a half-second. Although Shem moved quickly, Marl locked his arm against his body and rotated the stick backwards, out of his hand. Shem grimaced as the stick was twisted from his grasp. Marl released him and clapped him on the back, laughing heartily.

"Don't worry, Shem. Like I told you, Escrima is not as easy to pick up as you think. You'll get better with practice", he said, as he looked up at the quickly darkening sky.

Shem nodded wordlessly as he collected their workout gear in the growing dusk. The hope that he would be able to do well in the upcoming Tournament was fast fading. Unless he was able to place well in the competition, he stood no chance at winning the attention and affections of Mren, the mayor's daughter. Despite the fact that he was a half-foot shorter than almost all the other males, had a slight crook in his tail from a complication during his mother's pregnancy and became subject to extreme nervous clumsiness whenever she was around, Shem was determined to be with Mren, perhaps even marry her. His mind wandered, lost in thought of her. She was one of the most beautiful girls on the reservation, sleek and voluptuous. The only problem was, she knew it. Every eligible bachelor who thought he had a chance was chasing after her. She had developed the art of disinterest and coyness to somewhat of a science. Shem knew he could not compete in the handsomeness department against some of the more impressive physical specimens around, or even his brother Marl. But there had to be a way... it was rumored that Mren really liked good fighters, and it didn't matter if they weren't the handsomest...

His musings were interrupted by Marl's impatient gesture at him from where he sat on his bicycle, a shiny twenty-speed Lunar Titanium Fleetpedal that Dad had bought him for his birthday last month. Scrambling to his feet, Shem zipped and shouldered his pack. He glanced in disgust at his one-speed, dingy yellow bicycle before getting on it and following Shem back home. A crisp wind had begun to blow, and Shem smelled a storm coming.

After his chores around the house were done that evening, a bone-weary Shem gingerly sat down in the contoured chair next to his desk, sticking his tail through the hole in the center. He leaned back and sighed, letting his eyelids droop for a moment, starting back awake as his head nodded. Peering through grainy eyes at the clock on his desk, he saw that ten minutes had just disappeared. He groaned and sat up again. He was exhausted from working out all day, but there was still so much he wanted to do.

His eye fell on the sensor helmet he had gotten for his birthday two days ago, still in its box and he frowned. Whatever had possessed him to ask for that? He should have asked for a bike or a new jacket, something to look good with. Heck, he had never even used the thing. Reaching out, Shem removed the sensor helmet's instruction manual and data pack from its case. Might as well give it a run, he thought.

He activated his workstation and logged in to the Reservation Net. He never had regarded himself as a hacker, but he had been "playing" with the Net almost every day for the past three years. Bypassing lockouts and breaking file protections had been exciting, an interesting way to pass the time. He usually did his work by successively logging in to three other people's accounts located in different mainframes around the world, one through the other, before hitting his target. Last week, after a lot of thinking and studying, he had



finally managed to bypass a heavy-duty protection scheme that had been in place on a US government computer with an unlisted net address. He had used his hacked account on another US Government network to search for user accounts on the unlisted system. When he had found one, it was only a matter of hacking the double-tiered password through his other accounts. At one point he had all three accounts running cycling password programs in the background at the same time...

It had been a thrilling rush when he had finally gotten through. Exploring the system proved to be a disappointment. There was nothing of interest except compressed, encoded files. But as Shem moved through the directories, he had encountered a small group of huge data files.

At first he was at a loss as to what they were, until examining the headers of several of them revealed that they were Experience Modules, full-spectrum sensor recordings made by a Memory Analysis Computer. Experience Modules were a technology that had been banned many, many years ago. What were they doing here? Was this some forgotten system, sitting on a back shelf in some vast bureaucratic labyrinth? They were useless to Shem. There was no way to view them without a sensor helmet, or a booth, which was more popular. There was neither on the Reservation... except a broken unit in the library.

But it was the very next day that Shem's father gave him the choice of what he wanted for his birthday. The mysterious modules fresh in his mind, he had asked for cash. The Sensor helmet he bought was not the best in the catalog, of course, an old Yokodai ImageTech, but it was all he could buy with the 200 Eurodollars his father had transferred into his account.

Shem picked up the helmet from its case and, with a small tool, adjusted it for the considerably different shape of his head according to the section under "Special Adjustments". The sonic panels had to be moved back and up on their extension arms, the image inducer slid along a track several degrees so as to be properly positioned above his visual cortex. Finally, everything was done.

Adjusting the chair a little, Shem inserted the instruction pack into a module slot in the helmet, reached up and turned it on. The helmet's visor lowered a little, pinching his muzzle slightly as it activated in response to the workstation's transmission, blocking out normal sight. Shem lay back in the chair, his head cradled in the padded helmet.

Images flashed before his eyes as the unit came online, calibrating itself to his visual cortex. A swirling graphic display came into focus, thanking him for his purchase in several languages. The perspective was slightly skewed. After this, a room bloomed into view. A human was standing in front of him; Shem automatically inhaled, trying to catch a scent. The colors seemed slightly wrong, his field of vision too narrow. The man spoke in English first, what seemed a little loudly, instructing Shem in the use of the helmet and software. After a bit, the program ended and the helmet's visor raised.

Shem carefully removed the helmet and looked at it. Had that audiovisual recording been made by a human? Most likely. So that was how things looked from their eyes. Or maybe it just was not working right on him... no, the salesman had assured him over the vidphone that the helmet worked on Genetic Constructs the same as everyone else. Shem shrugged, touched several contact studs on the side of the helmet, adjusting the color and sound range according to the instructions. Then he attached the thick data cable from the back of the helmet to a data port on his workstation.

Over the next hour, Shem viewed two "Instructional" sensor recordings stored in the Reservation's library computer. The first concerned learning how to disassemble one of the Reservation's well-drilling robots and maintain it. It was not very interesting, but it had been made by a GC several years ago. The color range, perspective and spectrum were just fine; Shem could almost picture himself taking the robot apart. The next one on Farming proved more difficult to follow due to the distortions. Apparently, the problem did lie with tapes made by humans. Unfortunately, most tapes available publicly over the net had been made by humans. No wonder there was only one other helmet on the Reservation, in the Library. And it, of course, was broken. He could hardly make sense of what was going on sometimes, and it gave him a pounding headache.

Shem looked at the clock and waffled between going to sleep or viewing one of the modules he had found in the government computer. Curiosity won out, as it often did with him. He began going through his dummy accounts. Eventually, he logged in to the system. He dumped the encrypted text files attached to the experience modules through an adaptive decryption program. It would not be able to completely decrypt the files, but once in a while something would make sense, even if only one or two words or a group of letters. As the garbage scrolled by, his eye caught at the word "Gubbrick".

Shem knew that name. Gubbrick had been the man behind the original government project that had been responsible for the existence of Genetic Constructs in the first place! Shem shivered. Who knew what this module could be about? He continued looking through the decrypting text file, tweaking it, running the decoder over and over again. The name "Janet" appeared several times throughout the file. Shem closed his eyes and thought back to his school days. Janet Gubbrick was one of the first genetic constructs ever made, over two hundred years ago, reputed to have been a highly trained martial artist, rumored to be one of the progenitors of the species. Shem frowned at the size of the data file, over six hundred and eighty gigabytes in a highly compressed format. The local instructional files had only been a few megabytes in size. Experience modules apparently contained a lot more information! Or else this was a long recording...


Daphne Page...!
1993

Shem gently scratched behind one ear with a finger. It was far too large to download across the Net. It would take a half a day! Someone would be sure to be notice... Also, where would he put it? His personal data area was only five gigabytes in size. He would have to view it, bit by bit, leaving the only copy of the file on the government computer. Shem quickly set up a small, local program to save where in the file he left off and allow him to return to that point in the file later on.

He set the helmet back on his head and hesitated. There had to be a reason these modules were so heavily classified. Come to think of it, there were no experience modules in the Reservation's data base at all. Shem suddenly remembered... sensor recordings made by a Memory Analysis Computer had been found to have the disturbing tendency to impart characteristics of the individual so recorded onto the viewer, especially when using a neural induction helmet.

Shem picked up the instruction manual and looked up the technical specifications. Sure enough, this cheap unit was neural induction-based, straight into the cortex, with no compensating filters. Why should it have them? No one messed around with Experience Modules and Memory Analysis technology any more.

Shem cursed out loud, something he rarely did. What a waste of the two hundred dollars! Sitting back, he sighed and thought deeply, looking up at the roof beams. Also, what if something happened and he got traced or caught? The Reservation did not need any bad publicity.

But who could catch him, with the precautions he had taken? Besides... Janet had been a highly trained martial artist. Maybe he could get a handle on some of that training! The Tournament was only a few weeks off. Mren...

Shem decided a brief testing of the file could not hurt him. He reached out, touched the contact pad and began dumping the data directly to the helmet's program running in the workstation.

* * *

The year was 1968. Biodyne, a United States-based biological and genetics firm, was contracted to perform genetics research based on recent breakthroughs in DNA modification and gene splicing. Their main goal was to produce genetically engineered soldiers out of animals; ones that could withstand the harshest extremes of climate, be more efficient in combat and be able to be "manufactured" in quantity. Under he direction of the project administrator, the brilliant Professor Hans Gubbrick, PhD., a group of scientists worked diligently towards these objectives for several years, seeking to introduce what was perceived at the time to be the more desirable capabilities and phenotypes existing in currently available animals into human genetic material, modifying sperm and eggs by the thousands, attempting to get a viable composite that exhibited both characteristics.

Over these years, the group suffered many, many failures before they managed to get the hybridization process to work. A female exhibiting felinoid characteristics was their first viable success. She came to term in an artificial womb and the team rejoiced. They had really wanted a male, but when the pressure of the funding review rolled around, were happy enough to have anything to show the military that they were making progress towards the project goals. Doctor Gubbrick named the construct Janet, after his daughter. Unfortunately, the process was still not perfected, as the team was unable to duplicate its previous success. Constructs died before coming to term, did not gestate or came to term badly deformed and had to be destroyed. As the work continued, year after year, Janet grew up. Her first few formative years in the vast Biodyne complex were filled with an intensive education and testing program. The heavy load of study, coupled with endless physical examinations, experiments and blood samples led Janet to dislike the labs very much. Thus she was very happy when, at the age of six, she began her training in the Martial Arts with a small, highly skilled Asian man the military had assigned to Biodyne for the training of these constructs.

When the next five-year funding review period came up, Doctor Gubbrick and the scientists at Biodyne presented Janet in a closed session along with an in-depth review of the progress they had made in research to date. Janet caused quite a stir when she was brought forth. She stood about four feet tall, was covered in a light coat of fur. Her tail, snout and ears caused some of the people present to be taken aback, especially when she spoke to them, reading off a small speech. Although the results of the research seemed promising and Janet broke some planks in a demonstration of her Martial Arts skills, the military review board was not impressed.

The General heading up the board put it plainly. The military was unwilling to wait years for each of her type of construct to develop. He was unable to see any positive benefits afforded by the hybridization process worth the investment of time and money. Furthermore, he pointed out that the obvious physical differences made the constructs unsuitable for intermingling with normal people and cast the possibility of infiltration completely out of the window. He demanded new and better results from Biodyne. If they did not produce something worthwhile, and soon, their funding would be cut off. This meant constructs that could be produced quickly, exhibited far superior physical abilities, and were fairly indistinguishable from normal people.

The program which had produced Janet was canceled and shelved, despite the protests of Dr. Gubbrick, who eventually resigned from the company in disgust. The remaining scientists at Biodyne sat down and began attempting to break the barriers that constrained the basic human genetic material that they were working with. In desperation, a whole new series of projects were begun, designed towards modifying the current genetic code of human "volunteers" (usually criminals

sentenced to death in various States who chose this route to possible life over execution) so as to produce a slow transformation where selected mutations would appear. The changes were introduced through systemic flooding of DNA-reprogramming viruses and other recombinant DNA techniques rather than changing the DNA sequence in the single-celled ova and waiting for the fetus to develop as they had with Janet. If this technique could be perfected, enthused one scientist before the board, soldiers could be changed into a "Battle Form" before combat and back to normal, healthy soldiers at the end of a war.

For the most part, Janet was left on the sidelines during this bout of intense work and research. With nothing else to do since the cancellation of her project, Janet was free, for the most part, from the endless experiments and appearances before people she had endured while under the spotlight. The huge labs had all been moved down into the building's sub-basement. The old labs on her floor were for the most part empty. She threw herself into her Martial Arts training. Her trainer, Mr. Chai, had not been reassigned from the company. She made the best of his individual instruction. She achieved her first Dan Black Belt in Ju-Jitsu at the age of fifteen, her second at seventeen.

After several fruitless years of work and several dozen "failed" constructs, it looked like Biodyne was finally nearing a breakthrough. Several nearly successful results had been achieved through the use of their latest viral infusion and the General in charge of the program was very impressed. He set up a special training program for the soldiers he soon expected the company to begin producing prior to the announcement of the project before Congress. He hoped to have several dozen converted soldiers by then, capable of doing everything and anything, a more elite unit than the Navy Seals! Everyone would subside in grudging acceptance to the fait accompli and his political future would be guaranteed.

Since Janet had nothing better to do in the eyes of the scientists, they sent her ahead to enter the training program and "test it out" as they continued their experiments and prepared to convert the squad that the General was scouring the ranks for men to compose.

Janet was flown under guard in a military jet to the Classified Special Forces training facility at the Fort Benning Army Base in Georgia. It was her first time away from the labs that she thought of as home, and she found it all quite exciting. Unfortunately, her excitement was short-lived. Once at Fort Benning, she was not allowed to go out (except during Wilderness and Desert survival training sessions) or to have any contact with the base personnel other than the staff that had been assigned to train her. Janet's training in Ju-Jitsu served her well during her stay there; being in excellent shape, she was able to absorb all of the training they gave her and did very well over the next eight months.

During this time back at Biodyne, problems were afoot. Several of the "failed" experiments in the new series, convicts converted into half-men with horrific disfigurements and deformities, some with strength far beyond that of human, had managed to escape the cells in the lower levels of the complex where they had been kept for experimentation before they would be terminated. These creatures, for surely they were no longer men in body or mind, caused considerable havoc in the surrounding countryside and cities, killing and maiming over a hundred people all told.

Although the military and Biodyne did as much as they could to keep a lid on these matters, things eventually came out. When Biodyne was revealed as the source of these creatures, public outcry created a terrible scandal. The General met secretly with the members of Congress and the Senate who had been involved. Strong plans were laid to avoid the loss of all their positions. As the public and the press grew more insistent, government spokesmen, hedging, acknowledged that although the government had been funding research at the facility, they had been unaware of the inner workings and programs of the company. The politicians involved called such research and activities "immoral"and "ungodly", posturing in righteous indignation before the cameras in television interviews and speeches. Several investigative committees were formed by Congress and the Senate to look into the matter.

Most of Biodyne's research teams wound up being thrown to the wolves, their names and professional standings ruined. Many of the deformed creatures and half-men that had been found in cells in the complex's lower levels were brought before these committees and the nation on television. Those that were still coherent enough to speak, especially among the last few to be "made", told tales of horrifying abuse and neglect. The President, in a gesture of public magnaminity, saw to it that these poor individuals were to be given amnesty for their crimes, restored to full citizenship and a chance to live, once again in normal society. Public sympathy reached an all-time high, and fund raising campaigns on the behalf of these poor creatures by companies such as the Paranormal Rights Coalition generated a lot of revenue, setting up several small housing projects and food programs for them. There were some vociferous objections to the President's actions, the protestors claiming that letting death-row convicts back into society, especially after they had been victimized themselves, could only result in more problems. But the PR men gushed and overcame these hurdles, pointing out the government's "responsibility" to these men, that they had paid for their crimes ten times over with the corruption of their bodies. And so it came to pass.

With the slow, disastrous collapse of the Biodyne project, the cover-up of governmental involvement in such goings-on had a tough decision to make with Janet. No one had caught wind of her yet due to the fact that she had been out of the facility and down in Georgia when the FBI and media had come bursting in, as well as the fact that an "industrial accident" had conveniently destroyed most of Biodyne's records before they

could be subpoenaed by Committee. She was worth a lot to the government as well as to Biodyne in terms of research. Many options were discussed by the group of four agents assigned to the task, including simple termination or use as a special operative for some particularly vicious wet work. The cooler heads prevailed; not wanting to do anything that would cause more ripples in the hypersensitive press, it was decided that she should be "slipped in" along with the other Biodyne Constructs, provided with a citizenship, papers and a small stipend by the government in exchange for her signing a security agreement assuring her silence on the entire affair. She was not to live with them, though, and was to avoid all contact with the press.

After having this explained to her, and having seen what Biodyne had been doing on television, Janet sat down and had a long talk with two of the embittered scientists as they cleaned out their desks in the offices at Biodyne as to what it had all been about. The picture they gave her was rather bleak; they laid out the facts without any sugar coating.

As a genetic construct between human and several animal genotypes, a chimaera, she was sterile, unable to produce offspring with normal humanity. That meant, by textbook definition, she was not a member of the same species... the human species. If push ever came to shove with the government, that would be the deciding factor. She was not human, thus she was an animal. Look at her arm, was she not branded? As such, it would not have mattered if the military used her for cannon fodder or suicide missions, no more than it mattered that they trained dolphins to retrieve unexploded torpedoes. She was lucky enough that events had conspired to free her; she was on her own from now own, and would be well advised to keep clear of the government's machinations in the future.

Never having had any experience with the civilian world, Janet was taken by complete surprise when she was thrust rudely into it with the abrupt closing of the Biodyne building in New York. She was shocked by the disgust that flitted across the faces of some people who looked at her on the street, as well as the mutterings of "freak" that were occasionally muttered under their breaths. Such hatred! No one had ever really disliked her before, except the colonel in charge of her training at Fort Benning, and he had kept his feelings to himself on the matter. It looked to her like she was going to be an outcast in "polite" society. Or any society, for that matter. With her small packet containing a military driver's license and first month's check for $400, Janet went looking for a place to stay.

She managed, after a lot of telephone inquiries, to get a small apartment in a bad section of New York City, sending the rent money in by mail. People there still looked at her strangely, but after a while her neighbors grew somewhat used to her and it was possible to live a semblance of a normal life. She told anyone who asked that she was a mutant, and had been born that way. It made her unhappy to lie, so she rarely elaborated. Her curt replies usually left friendly questioners with the feeling that she had suffered a hard childhood and they had brought up feelings best left undiscussed. Although Janet did not know it, she was very lonely. Faced with the realization that she would never be able to have any children and socially inept, she was desperately unhappy.

The monies coming from the government were just enough to keep her in rent and food for her tiny one room apartment, but who knew how long they would last? If some investigative reporter or snoop began looking into the Biodyne scandal again and discovered her existence, she would be totally cut off. So, discreetly, she began looking for a job. But the economy was in terrible shape, unemployment at record highs. Janet, with few real marketable skills to speak of and with her somewhat unusual appearance working against her, had a hard time of it. But she did not give up. One day, finally, she found a position at a Martial Arts School. She found Joseph Xiang, the owner of the school, quite a personable and open-minded fellow, who did not mind her physical differences at all. In exchange for helping to teach those students that did not take offense at her presence, he would let her come to the advanced classes at night, as well as provide her a small amount of money each week. This last, she felt, was provided more out of sympathy than necessity.

It was only about two months later when the anti-mutant mentality and violence fomented by factions seeking political power in the government began to spread throughout the city. Other groups, hearkening to their banner of racial and genetic purity began stirring up trouble around the city, starting riots and gunfights amongst the minorities in the city.

Janet was forced to leave her job at the school. Joe was quite sorry, but they both knew her presence was costing him business. She hoped someday to be able to return. It had been a happy time for her.

The ugly mood and urge to violence in the city was growing with each surge of propaganda put out by organizations such as the Council for the Preservation of Humanity. Their inflammatory speeches and lies were all dutifully broadcast by the media, who were fanning the flames and profiting by the resulting higher ratings. Racial and genetic tensions were high; anti-mutant and racist graffiti was beginning to appear throughout the city, everywhere one looked. People hurled occasional epithets at her as she walked back to her neighborhood from Joe's Martial Arts School. She saw in a newspaper that the Biodyne Construct Housing Project had been firebombed by an angry mob. Several people had been killed in the ensuing riot.

Back in the safety of her small apartment, Janet lay on the bed, staring at the wall. What was she going to do? Face the humiliation and disappointment involved in trying to find another job? Walk the streets and risk getting mobbed or shot? She could not afford to move to a better neighbor-



hood... what was she to do?

She turned her face into the pillow and cried for the first time in years.

* * *

Shem started as the helmet shut down and raised its visor. He had been completely absorbed in the preview the computer had run for him. It had been an incredible feeling, so much more solid and realistic than the sensor tapes he had viewed so far, almost as though he was remembering the events himself, as if he had only forgotten them. They came bursting upon him in sudden realization, vivid and bright.... Absolutely wonderful. He took the helmet off and scratched his head, thinking that things sure had been strange back in those days. He stretched in the chair as he thought about what he had seen.

He knew some things about Janet; he had studied her a little in secondary school. She was the first construct ever to be created, the ancestress, pretty much, of everyone on the reservation. He did not know that there had been any modules made of her. Why was it classified? Maybe it was because of the cover-up... but that was so many, many years ago...

Looking at the clock, he debated continuing to view the module. But he had to get up before dawn tomorrow. The Reservation's duty roster cycled each weekend, switching people's jobs around so that everyone got a handle on everything and no one got bored. At least, of course, that was the theory. Shem had, unfortunately, drawn Farm Duty this week, something he detested. He had to get the tractor robots going and plow the fields. Well, another hour or so would not be too bad, he mused. After all, it was like watching a movie. His body was already practically asleep. He set a small timing program in the Workstation to signal after another half-hour. Slipping the helmet back over his head and adjusting the contacts by his ears, Shem reached over and touched the Execute pad twice.

* * *

Having recently lost her job at the Martial Arts studio, Janet was feeling rather depressed. All of the nagging doubts and crushing weight of her past had come home to sit on her shoulders. She felt very alone and unhappy. But that day, when she checked the mail, Janet found she had received a flyer advertising the Dirty Gene Pool, a night spot in Greenwich Village. Although her first instinct was to throw it away, her eye was caught by the line, "Where people can go to just be people". Since the flyer said Wednesday nights ladies get in free, she decided to go and see what it was all about. The train ride over to Greenwich Village from the tiny apartment in Harlem was awful; two overweight black women seemed to take delight in laughing amongst one another about her appearance. By now, Janet was used to such things and simply ignored them as best she could.

The club was awash with loud sounds and unfamiliar smells. Janet drifted about uncomfortably, eyeing the people thronging about inside, getting the layout of the place down. There was a large central dance pit in which people were dancing. In this pit there were four raised platforms upon which girls in different costumes gyrated to the beat of the music. A large rack of motorized lights, speakers and fog effect machinery was suspended from the ceiling above. Tables were spaced around the pit at intervals, so that diners could look down at the dancers and the girls. Far off to one quiet side of the club there was a roped off area marked "VIP Lounge", with subdued lighting sparkling off of silverware and candles.

She eventually met and was being introduced to folks by Stuart, a young black man of dubious intentions. Things had turned positively cordial when something dressed in a heavy overcoat and hat despite the heat in the club grabbed her by one arm. She stifled a gasp as she turned. Under the hat was the snout of a reptilian construct, one of the type characterized as Biodyne's last "successes" before the closure of the project. It was staring down at the Biodyne brand on her forearm. Stuart tried to intervene, but the reptile grabbed him with his other arm and stared him deeply in the eyes. Janet was alarmed when Stuart's eyes wandered and he walked away, seemingly puzzled. Janet debated reversing the creature's hold or simply calling for help, but decided to see what it wanted first.

The creature drew her quietly over to a table in the VIP lounge. It seemed to know and be known by the local staff at the club, who showed them to a table and left them alone. After sitting down, the creature released her arm. It began to speak with her in a hissing monotone, asking her rather blunt questions as to her "current involvement" with Biodyne. Not knowing what to make of this possibly unstable construct and knowing nothing of the situations or politics he was referring to, Janet did not say much of anything. Biodyne was gone, disbanded by the government, their Corporate Charter revoked. For all she knew, he could be an agent for the government, testing her to see if she was adhering to the letter of the security agreement which she had signed. After a while of him (for it seemed to be male) asking questions which she refused to answer, the conversation turned sour. The creature, who had called itself Bridlaun while it was attempting to be polite, seemed to want to continue questioning her, perhaps in a more violent manner, ignoring her protests that she did not know what he was talking about and that she was not "involved" with Biodyne. Eventually, frustrated, it hissed at her angrily and stormed out of the club.

Janet had no intention of leaving the precincts of the club any time soon, as the construct might be waiting outside to waylay her. So she availed herself of the hors d'ourves left behind on the VIP lounge table by Bridlaun, a welcome change from her normal fare of prepackaged food. As she was busy with doing this, Janet was approached by an attractive black woman who appeared to be in her early thirties. She introduced herself as Linda, the owner of the club and a friend of Bridlaun. Janet was suspicious; was this some sort of good

cop/bad cop routine on the part of Bridlaun or his "friends" to get her to talk?

Through the course of their conversation, Janet discarded that idea. Not once did Linda ask any questions about Biodyne or her past. Linda, who was remarkably friendly, uncovered the fact that Janet was in need of a job and adroitly inquired if she might consider trying out for the job of an erotic dancer on the club floor, naming a handsome price. After some hesitation as she regarding the scantily-clad girls gyrating on the dance platforms, Janet agreed to try out for the position. An appointment was made for the next afternoon. Janet stayed for another hour, watching the dancers at work and wondering what she was getting herself into.

The next afternoon, Janet came to the Club and was let in by Lawrence, one of the Staff members, who affected a large bang of hair overhanging his forehead, much like a sheepdog. On the dance pit floor was Linda and several dancers who were practicing some routines. Janet was introduced to the other girls present. Teri, a short blonde girl, took an instant liking to her, while another girl who was also named Janet seemed to dislike her on sight. After speaking with Linda for a while, she was led backstage by Teri to get changed into a dancing outfit.

The back of the club was separated into the kitchens, office, equipment and changing rooms. Teri helped Janet change into a slinky two-piece which resembled a shiny, scaled bikini more than anything else. She whistled in surprise as Janet slipped out of her blouse and pants, looking at her tail and well muscled body. Her light coat of fur accentuated certain muscles and hid others. Janet looked at herself in the mirror, thinking she looked ridiculous in the bikini. Shrugging, she went back with Teri to the front.

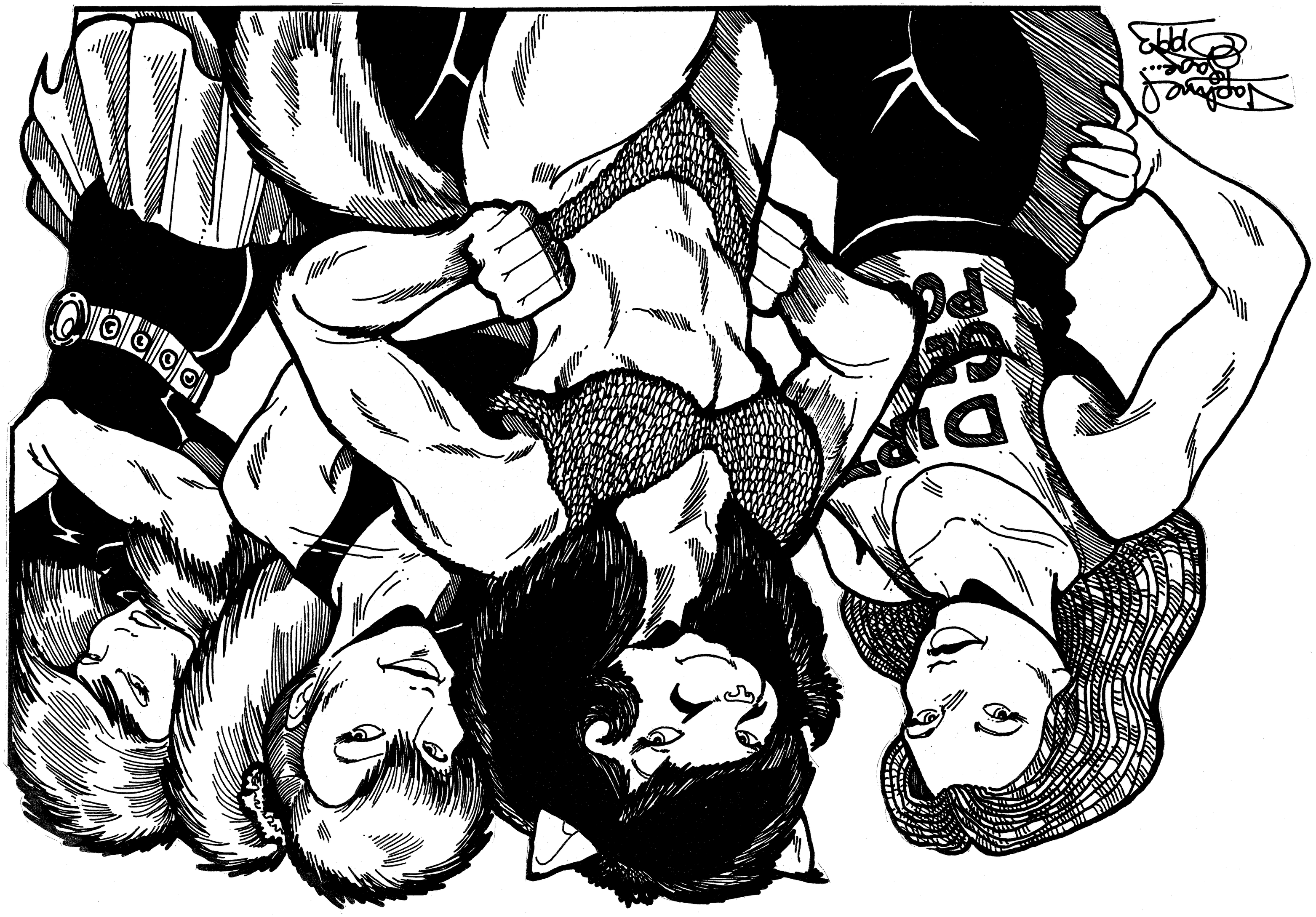
The group seemed somewhat startled at Janet's appearance. Perhaps they had not consciously realized that she had fur all over her body, or perhaps they were surprised at her somewhat muscular appearance. Not to say she was bulging with muscles, it was merely that Janet was tall for a woman, standing about five foot ten. She had engaged in strenuous excercise every morning and evening for the last several years, and had a tight, dense musculature that reflected it. The combination of the two, especially now that she was out of the loose blouse and baggy pants she had been wearing, was startling. After some small talk, Linda asked her to dance to some music being played. Janet did passably well, having closely observed the dancers the prior evening. The other Janet's acerbic comments about her appearance unnerved her, but were effectively silenced by Linda's telling her to leave, which she did, looking somewhat hurt. After that, things grew a lot more fun as Teri and Cathy gave Janet some tips and showed her some more dance steps. A little later, Linda announced that she was hired. Speaking with her on the side, Linda gave her a business check for $1,000 to go out and buy some new "working" clothes. Janet was flushed with pleasure, positively elated. She had never had this much money before in her entire life. It meant something more than just better food and shelter. It meant freedom.

Janet went over and cashed the check at her bank the next day. She deposited some of it, taking the remainder to go shopping for food and clothes. After making several selections in a large clothing store, she went to the dressing room. While in the midst of trying on some clothes she had selected, her attention was drawn by two men having an argument on the sales floor outside. Peeking her head around the edge of the women's dressing room door, Janet saw that a huge, powerfully built man, standing about six and a half feet tall, with a buzz cut hairstyle was arguing with a blonde-haired, slender youth, looking no older than fourteen, regarding his "terrible" taste in clothes. The kid was completely dressed in the latest in fashionable clothing, nothing wrong with it that Janet could see. After a while it seemed that the big man might even strike the young lad, but he eventually stormed off, leaving the youth with a fistful of money and instructions to buy whatever "stupid clothing" appealed to him. The youth seemed about to leave when he espied Janet's furry head peeking out from the dressing room door. He smiled at her, then disappeared into thin air. Janet jumped a little and ducked her head back in to the dressing room, only to find the young man standing behind her in the confines of the booth! She squeaked in surprise and embarrassment, attempting to cover herself with the blouse she had been holding in one hand.

Quite nonchalantly, the young fellow tried to strike up a conversation. He introduced himself as Tim, also known as Spectre. He was a paranormal, a teleporter. He had gained his incredible abilities, it seemed, as the result of some sort of laboratory experiment. He babbled incessantly and rapidly, boasting of his acquaintance with the superhero team known as Solutions Incorporated and his associations with the other paranormals in the city. Janet, who was standing with her back to the wall, noticed that he appeared somewhat translucent, as though he was not really there at all. He had no scent. He did not seem dangerous, but his casual disregard for her privacy seemed to indicate a serious lack of moral fiber. Eventually the young man seemed to have realized that he was getting nowhere fast, no doubt due to his current location and circumstances, and opted to depart rather than continue from a bad start, leaving a very startled and somewhat embarrassed Janet suspiciously eyeing the wall through which he had just walked.

No worse for wear from her encounter with Spectre, Janet staggered back to her tiny apartment with a double armload of bags and boxes. As she unlocked the door, she was quite surprised to find herself humming happily. Eating a hearty meal, Janet stretched and took a short nap in preparation for the night ahead. That evening, along with three other girls, Janet danced for the crowd in the Club until she was exhausted, took a short break just before the midnight rush and did it all over again.

Afterwards, she went home and took a hot, relax-


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ing shower, brushed her teeth and hair, combed her fur and fell asleep, happy for the first time in many, many weeks.

* * *

The timing buzzer jolted him out of his daze and Shem groped for the workstation's contact pad, sliding his fingers through the field in a hold pattern. Removing the helmet, he smiled crazily up at the ceiling. It was incredible! To think that he had found an experience module containing a record of someone who had encountered one of the Paranormals of the Golden Age! He wanted to continue and see if Janet had ever seen this person again, but caught sight of the clock and groaned. It was time to hit the sack, with no more delays! Reluctantly, he saved his current position in the module and deactivated his workstation. He stretched, yawned and padded into the refresher for a quick shower. The scrubber blasted him from all directions with ultrasonically-agitated jets of water which effervesced under his fur, tingling against his skin, followed by thin, powerful planes of warm air that sluiced the water down and out. Feeling somewhat revitalized, Shem climbed out of the scrubber and tapped a request into the dispenser as he ran a brush through his slightly damp fur. A few seconds later, a packet of AntiBac had been pneumatically delivered from Central Stores into his house, sliding into the tray by his desk. Shem opened the packet and rubbed a thin ribbon of the stuff on his front teeth. Activated by his saliva, the genetically engineered bacteria in the goo would spread out and consume all of the plaque and food particles in his mouth over the next six hours, dissolving into a minty-tasting residue when their lifespan expired. He dumped some of the junk off of his bed and curled up exhaustedly. His sleep that night was filled with images of standing on the floor of the club called The Dirty Gene Pool, while Mren danced tantalizingly on a platform above. But every time he tried to get close to her, big humans wearing Staff shirts pushed him away.

Waking up was an unpleasant sensation, as Shem ached all over from the previous day's workout. He groaned at the workstation's shrill piping, then stumbled out of his bedding, padded over and shut off the alarm. It was 0604 hours, time to get to work. Rubbing the granular oculation from the corners of his eyes, Shem went into the refresher and requested a tab of aspirin from the dispenser, frowning as he looked at himself in the mirror. His fur was in a serious state of disarray, as he had fallen asleep with it still slightly damp. Picking up his short wire brush, he set to work, steeling himself against the aches in his muscles as he waited for the aspirin to kick in and relieve some of the pain as it dilated his capillairies. He really should have gone a little easier on the workout the other day, he reasoned. But it was so seldom that he got a chance to really work out, and with the Tournament coming up... and now, with Farm Duty he would have even less. Shem sighed and finished brushing his fur back into shape.

The common room of the house was noisy with everyone already present for breakfast. His brother Marl and three younger siblings, Drew, Kara and Rea were there, as well as Mom and Dad. Smelled like they had hot chicken buns for breakfast. Shem frowned. Even though protochicken was simply chicken tissue engineered to grow in vats, he preferred "real" chicken, with bones and skin, even if it cost ten times as much. Not that you could tell the difference in the ground-up paste that filled the buns. He walked over and sat down in the free chair opposite the kids. Something sharp jabbed the back of his right leg and he leaped into the air with a "Yeeeowch!", banged one knee into the table and fell over backwards. Marl made a fast save for the pitcher of milk as the kids dissolved into hilarious laughter. When Shem looked up, his father, sitting at the head of the table and viewing the morning news reports, was looking at his son with a dissatisfied expression on his face.

Shem struggled to untangle himself from the chair on the floor, wincing as he pulled his tail out from under himself. It throbbed where the back of the chair had smashed it against the tiling. He reached down and pulled the thumbtack from the back of his leg and stared venomously over at the three giggling kids. His mother looked in to see if everything was all right as his father spoke up angrily. "Shem, what do you think you are doing? Go to your room until I call for you!"

A dull anger built in Shem, willing him to strike out, to beat the faces of those smirking brats in. He knew explaining was futile. For all that he had done in raising the family, Shem knew his father was limited in certain respects. He collected a mournful glance and shrug from Marl as he turned, seething, and apologized to his father for the spectacle. He stopped off in the kitchen, touched cheeks with his mother, grabbed two buns from the cooling rack and went up to his room. Flopping onto his bed, he stared at the ceiling, angrily biting into a bun. Those rotten kids! He had always tried to be a good brother and where had it gotten him? Nowhere. He felt a surge of depression and sighed mournfully. There was no point in trying to get revenge, he knew. The kids would only go wailing to Mom or Dad, who seemed to make exceptions for them and take their side of any story.

He turned over and looked at the sensor helmet sitting on his desk. He had a goodly wait ahead, as his father liked to take his time at breakfast and the airbus was not going to drop by for them until 0700 hours. Why not make the best of this? He picked up the helmet, ran quickly through his logon sequences, prompted the workstation and lay back down in bed, the helmet activating even as he nestled it on his head.

* * *

Having the next day off from work at the Dirty Gene Pool, Janet spent it stretching, exercising and shopping for books on dancing, which she read and practiced before a mirror until she was confident she had a nice, spicy routine to use should the situation demand something extra. After a long, hot shower and brushing her hair and fur, she fell into a deep sleep, ready to meet

the challenges of the next day, whatever they might be.

Janet called in to the Dirty Gene Pool the next day to find out if she was scheduled to dance that night. The phone was, unfortunately, picked up by the other Janet, the dancer who disliked her. Janet briefly debated hanging up, but decided to press on. She hesitantly asked the girl if she was supposed to be working that night. The other girl checked and said no, but there was a gleeful tone to her voice that Janet distrusted. Muttering vile imprecations to herself, Janet went back from the pay phone to her dingy one-room apartment and packed her bag with one of the dancing outfits she had purchased last week.

The train ride to the Dirty Gene Pool was uneventful. Some of the passengers stared at her rather rudely, some snickered, but most maintained an aloof, "above it all" New Yorker attitude and studiously ignored her. She even caught a few pitying comments about "Those poor victims of Biodyne", depsite having her ears flattened against the ultrasonic squealing of the train wheels against the track.

Arriving at the club, Janet greeted the bouncers perkily and slipped inside. She quietly moved to the back room and peered at the dance schedule. Sure enough, it was as she had feared. She had been scheduled to work tonight; someone had crossed her time slot out and replaced it... with the other Janet's! Her lips pursed, she went in search of the club's manager. She found the manager angrily conversing with one of the club's bouncers near the bar. Janet waited patiently by until she was noticed. After explaining the situation to the manager and showing her the altered time sheet, Janet was pulled in her wake as the manager stormed off to the dressing room.

In the hallway near the dressing room, the other Janet had gotten dressed up and was waiting for the current shift to go offstage so she could begin. She eyed them nervously as the pair approached. In a loud exchange, the manager chewed the would-be dancer out and told her if anything like this happened again, she was fired, no questions asked. The girl fled into the back room, almost in tears. Janet steeled herself and followed, alone.

Janet tossed her bag down on the dressing room table and began to change, ignoring the hateful glances cast her way by the other girl. As Janet finished and was about to leave, the other Janet retorted, "If I lose my job, you damned freak, I'll break your face!" Janet looked at her and wordlessly left for the dance floor to take her spot. If push came to shove, she thought, it would be no one's fault but her own if she gets hurt.

The next evening, during a break, Janet found herself once again approached by the lizard chimaera known as Bridlaun. He appeared rather dishevelled and agitated this time, almost to the point of physical violence. He attempted to question her, grabbed her by one arm and grew loud. Fortunately, two of the Staff bouncers came up. Janet had them remove him. Bridlaun left on the rather sinister note that he would be back with friends who would be more "persuasive". Janet told the manager, who made sure the bouncers would not let Bridlaun in again that evening. Janet hoped this would be the end of the matter.

During the peak hour of midnight, when the club was packed, there was a commotion near the door. Janet glanced that way and saw Bridlaun arguing with two of the bouncers. She also noticed the large man, whom Spectre had called Powerhouse, entering the club with a smaller black fellow. They split up and approached her dancing platform from two different directions. Janet, growing nervous, began doing the spicy routine she had practiced, in an attempt to pack the crowd about her platform a bit more tightly and buy time as she figured out what to do. Her time ran out as Bridlaun, growing weary of arguing with the implacable staff members at the door, leapt upwards over their heads and, his hands and feet somehow adhering to the ceiling, scuttled, upside-down, towards her platform, like some sort of nightmarish crab. At the same time, the thin black fellow had gotten through the crowd to the side of her platform and was making disgusting, lewd comments, apparently trying to unnerve her. On the other side, the large man was bulling his way through a thick part of the crowd, his going slowed by the tightly packed dancers.

Janet, frightened thoroughly now, spied a small gap as it opened in the crowd surrounding her platform. In a flash she had thrown herself off the platform and into it, dodging and weaving as she made her way to the back rooms. At this, bedlam broke out behind her as the large man redoubled his pace, picking people up bodily and flinging them to the sides as he lumbered through the crowd in pursuit. Bridlaun, who had lost his floppy hat, dropped from the dark ceiling into the mass of dancers below, teeth bared, causing a terrible panic as shrieking teenagers fled away from him, punching, kicking and trampling each other in their desperation to get away.

Janet darted into the dressing room and slammed the door behind her, throwing the small latch. Her heart was pounding in her chest as her eyes glanced left and right, seeking a weapon of some sort. Nothing met her gaze except the half-opened window leading to the alleyway behind the club. She heard crashing sounds and a loud shouting argument behind her in the hallway; she decided to run for it. She threw open the window and dropped to the ground outside, her bare feet making little squishing sounds in the half-frozen mud of the alleyway. She darted away, running full-tilt towards the street. If she could only get to a cab, she could get away and call Linda or someone who could help her! She did not know why these people were after her, but they obviously meant no good.

Her only warning was a slight hum as a crackle of electricity engulfed her. The blast of lightning struck her in the upper back, on her right shoulderblade. Her body convulsed as the electricity grounded out through her body into the wet mud of the alleyway. Janet flipped off her feet and

went sprawling on the wet ground, twitching and writhing, the patch of fur on her upper back smoking. She may have screamed; it was impossible to tell. Everything vanished temporarily in a red haze of pain. She looked up as boots slammed into the muck in front of her, splattering her face. Someone dressed in a neutral grey jumpsuit and a featureless hood towered over her as she lay on the icy ground. Heavy footfalls splashed up the alleyway as the large man called Powerhouse came charging up. Janet raised herself shakily to one knee, still weak and staggered by the shock, and gasped as she saw the streetlights dimly reflecting off of Bridlaun's scaly hide as he clung to the vertical wall of the building opposite.

"Goop her, Brid!" shouted the large man. The chimaera opened his mouth and vomited a hot, sticky stream of filth upon Janet. It splashed across her shoulders and back as she weakly struggled to rise. The stench of the liquid made her gag as she tried to cry out. Worse yet, it was quickly hardening, freezing her limbs in place. The chimaera continued to vomit the liquid upon her in a steady stream until her entire lower body was covered. The chimaera descended, picked up her body, encased in the mass of hardened, gelatinous goo and began to climb straight up the side of the building. Incredibly, the strange, gray-clothed man floated silently after them in the air, a small nimbus of energy surrounding him. Janet screamed for help at the two bouncers who stared up at them as they retreated, but her words were lost in the rush of wind as the chimaera leapt into the night sky, carrying her. The large man shouted to his companions, "Let's get her back to the lab!". Horrific visions flashed before her eyes; shaking, she passed out.

She came to in a van, its windows covered with blinds. It was driving along at a quick pace, the floorboards humming and swaying as the vehicle jounced over slight imperfections in the highway. The gray-clothed man was sitting in a seat nearby, eyeing her prone form as it lay on the floor. The sticky goo surrounding her chest and lower body had constricted somewhat, pushing her breasts up like a corset. He nodded to himself and made a coarse sexual comment. The large man turned partway around in the driver's seat and nodded, muttering in a low voice "Man, are you <u>always</u> horny?". My God, thought Janet. They are going to rape me and God knows what else! Her mind steadied; her training clamped down and she stared impassively at the man ogling her body. She had to think clearly if she was going to escape alive from this.

After a few hours, the van came to a stop. Janet, her head covered and muffled with a blanket, was carried outside and up a set of steps. She tried to struggle, but was unable to move inside the confining goo. She was set down in a chair and the blanket was removed. Confronting her were three men -- the large man known as Powerhouse, Bridlaun, and the gray-clothed man. "Okay, talk!", growled the chimaera. Janet remained silent, staring at him. "Let's get her out of that stuff", suggested the gray-clothed man. Of course, they can't rape me through it, thought Janet. Maybe I have a chance to escape after all... if I can get free, I can probably take them out in hand-to-hand! They probably have no idea that I am a black belt... I'll have to take the man in grey out first... but watch out for the lizard...

Her thoughts were cut short as the lizardlike man known as Bridlaun shuffled forward and reached out. The goop stretched and tore under his hands, taking some of Janet's fur with it. She clenched her teeth and waited for her chance. She was free in a moment, but they were all alert, watching her. Janet noticed that they were all rather agitated, the large man in particular, glancing about the room and even behind himself occasionally. The large man uncertainly said, "Maybe we should talk about this like civilized people, make some coffee or something". The gray-clothed man turned on him and shrilly screeched, "Don't drink the coffee!!! Not unless SHE wants to drink some first?!". The large man grimaced, nodded and turned back to face her. "Look", he said, "there are two ways we can do this. The hard way and the easy way". He picked up a small end table and casually broke it in two, apparently with the strength of his hands alone. Janet decided against trying anything violent at the moment, but otherwise made no moves, her eyes flicking from one man to the next. After an uncomfortable pause, the gray-clothed man looked at the large one and asked, "How do you feel about torture?". Janet inhaled and mentally began reviewing pain-blocking techniques. Fortunately, the chimaera called Bridlaun seemed to take exception to this. It slowly turned and growled in a low, dangerous voice, "What did you say?". The gray-clothed man raised his hands as if in protest or denial, making small gulping noises as he took a half-step backwards. The chimaera shuffled forward and said, "I want to speak with you alone", and pulled him out the door, slamming it behind him. Janet's eyes flicked from the tall man to the splintered wreckage on the floor. She gauged the distance from the chair to the light switch on the wall. She had been trained to fight in low light situations. If she could shut the lights out, she could batter the man until he fell. But if he got his hands on her... but her musings along these lines were interrupted as the door quickly reopened and the two men came back into the room. The gray-clothed man moved somewhat jerkily, as though he had been frightened. Yet no smell of fear came from him as he took up a position to Janet's right. "Hold her", growled the lizard.

Janet's head was grasped by the big man on the left. "Hold her eyes open", ordered the lizard. She tried to struggle, but his fingers moved over her face and pulled her eyes open. The gray-clothed man reached over and pinned her wrists to the arms of the chair. The lizard shuffled closer, his eyes strangely reflective, almost glowing in the dim light. Janet remembered how his strange gaze had affected the young man back at the club; was it to be her turn now? Not if she could help it! When the creature drew close enough, Janet lunged in the chair, bringing up a straight knee into its chest. But moving with preternatural speed, Bridlaun blocked the blow with its arm and hissed angrily at her. It grasped her knees, held her legs down and leaned close. She rolled her eyes up in her head, desperately trying to avoid his gaze. The stench of his breath, like a piece of rotting meat mixed with that vile goo he had shot upon her, filled her nostrils, making her gag. Her eyes burned, the muscles hyperactively jumping.

Eventually, she could hold them up no longer, and locked gazes with him.

His glowing eyes seemed to expand until they filled her world, throbbing in time to her pulse. Everything else receded, considerations, pain, fear and feeling. As though floating in a cloud of mist, she heard questions thundering through the dimness. She answered them dully, dutifully speaking the answers that first occurred to her, agreeing when they asked her to do so or it seemed that was what they wanted to hear. This went on for some time.

After a while, she began to sense a strange flickering in the clouds about her. The questions had ceased some time ago, although time was meaningless in that state. Suddenly, she realized she was sitting in a chair, and that her eyes were closed. She opened them and eyed the three men dully. They were arguing amongst one another; the chimaera seemed to settle it with the grim words, "I'll handle it". My God, she thought. They've finished questioning me... they are going to kill me now! As the two other men left the room, the lizard approached. Feigning unconsciousness, Janet waited for her chance. As the lizard stepped up and bent down to examine her, Janet acted! Throwing her weight back against the chair, she sent it flying backwards and down. Simultaneously, she grasped the lizard behind the neck and flipped it overhead with her feet, using the tilting chair as the fulcrum, bringing it up off the ground, over her head and down against the hard parquet floor, the lizard smashing down with a resounding crunch! As they crashed to the ground, she applied all of the strength in her frame in a vicious choke hold, trying to cut off the supply of blood to its brain. As she strained, the lizard said, quite distinctly, "What do you think you are trying to do?"

Janet belatedly realized that, for some reason, her technique was ineffective... she had not hurt the creature in the slightest! Before she could make another move, the lizard easily broke her grip and flipped its bulk on top of her, moving so fast she could do nothing. It was incredibly strong, inhumanly strong. In desperation, she tried to snap an elbow into the side of its jaw, but it pinioned her arms. She struggled futilely against its bulk, even invoking her body's hysterical strength in trying to throw it off, but its hands were somehow holding onto the flooring and she was unable to budge it. Its muscles were like roped steel cables, its hide thick, hard and dense. Eventually, her chest heaving, she subsided. The chimaera eyed her disinterestedly for a moment as she lay underneath him and then released her. She scrambled to her feet, panting with her tongue lolling out of her mouth, her skimpy dancing costume torn and bedraggled from the fight.

"If that's what it's going to take to get you to talk, I'd rather you escape than be tortured", growled the lizard. Reaching over, he opened a window, stepped back and pointed to the darkness and dimly lit ground beyond. Her heart pounding, Janet leapt out of the window. She did not know where she was, but only that she had to get away from this terrible place and these terrible people. She gasped in pain as she rolled on the shoulder that had been hit with the blast of electricity. Flipping to her feet, she saw she was standing on cold, hard dirt. A thin slice of the moon shone weakly above. From what she could see, she was standing near a small house in a forest. Darting off, she ran into the darkness, stumbling occasionally on sharp rocks and tree roots, the cold wind howling through the treetops biting and stinging her almost nude form. Her bare feet were soon sore and bleeding, cut by twigs and sharp rocks. She ran on into the forest for what seemed like hours, falling once into an icy pool of muddy water. Finally, unable to run any further, she collapsed in an exhausted, shivering heap. As she lay gasping for breath on the forest floor, moisture steaming from her body in the freezing air, her ears caught the slight sound of something moving in the darkness back the way she had come. Her nose twitched as she scented the lizard's musk on the air. They were coming after her! Desperation giving her strength, she lurched unsteadily to her feet and stumbled onwards. After several minutes of panicked flight in the darkness, she ran full-tilt into a tree and fell down, almost senseless. Holding her bleeding, bruised muzzle, she got to her feet and clambered up into the low branches, breathing as quietly as she could through her mouth, trying not to shiver, one hand cupped under her nose to catch the blood that slowly dripped out. Crouched there, she listened carefully for other signs of pursuit over the whistling of the wind. After a while, hearing nothing, her limbs beginning to cramp and the water from her dunking freezing in her short fur, she dropped from the tree onto the ground and stared into the darkness. As she recalled her survival training, she knew she had to start a fire or she would surely freeze to death. But with no tools, not even a knife, it was going to be hard or impossible on short notice. Plus, any light could give her position away... but it was have a fire or die. She began feeling about in the almost absolute darkness for small rocks, snapping them together gently, trying to make a spark but little noise. All too soon she began to tremble and shiver violently, her hands becoming too numb for it even to be felt if she was still holding a rock or not, much less find more. Her nose burned with each breath she took of the frigid air. Up until now, she had not realized exactly how cold it was. Her body had been heated from the fight and the running through the forest. Now she was shivering and rapidly weakening. In utter desperation, she began to scoop out handfuls of the hard, cold earth, forming a little hollow in the ground. She lay down in this and curled into a fetal position, trying to conserve her body heat, shivering and trembling. Exhaustion battled for supremacy over the agony of the cold. As her eyes began to close, she wondered if she would ever wake up again, or if it was her grave that she had dug. A darkness more profound than any she had ever before felt descended slowly upon her and she knew no more.

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Shem started back to reality as someone knocked loudly on his door. He was feeling confused, the room spinning slightly as his cortex tried to pro-

cess two inputs at once. His breath was coming quickly, his heart beating strongly... he felt as though he need to run, to escape. But when he slipped the helmet off, the feelings faded away. His fingers flew through the contact pad's fields on the workstation, saving his position and logging him off off his accounts. He called out that he was coming, he was in the fresher. Finishing, he got up, tried to compose himself and went to the door. It was his father, with a stern look on his features.

"Shem, I think we need to talk." His father shook his head as he walked into the room and surveyed the scattered articles of clothing, rumpled bedding and cluttered tabletop. "I don't know what you were trying to do at the breakfast table. I understand you may be feeling a little resentment now, with the younger kids beginning to infringe on what you perceive as your rights. It's not easy, going from the pampered youngest to a position of responsibility. But trying to gain attention through these childish antics has to stop. You have to think about what you are doing before you do it and analyze your motives. Once you do that for a while, you will find that everything makes a bit more sense." Laying a hand on Shem's shoulder, he continued. "It's difficult, growing up. I know. But these things pass. I just want you to know that if there's anything you need to talk about, I'm here for you."

Shem looked at his father and sighed inwardly. The fellow really had no clue as to what was going on. He was all too ready to imagine Shem was so starved for some kind of parental affection that he was acting strange in a bid to get some. As usual, the kids were not even brought up as a possible source of a problem. If he mentioned it, or tried to tell the truth, it would be seen as more of the same. Shem did sigh, then. He nodded and said dutifully, "Thanks, Dad. I'll try."

Shem's father smiled and clapped him on the shoulder. "That's a good boy! Now come on; we've got a lot of work to do today." Turning, he left the room. Shem looked after him and down at the helmet on the table. Now he understood another reason why experience modules were not used any more. The compulsion to sit and experience someone else's life, one so much more exciting than his own, was powerful. Even now, he felt the lure of it. He knew Janet had not died... if she had, he would not be where he was now. In addition, there would be no module to view. But still... the urge to continue was strong.

Gently placing the helmet back in its case on the table, he deactivated the workstation and followed his father to the main room. The experience module was not going anywhere; and its recorder had been dead for well over two hundred years. The only rush was in his own mind. Besides, while he was in the fields, he would get a chance to practice some of the techniques he had seen Janet do during her morning exercise routine.

The day was hot and humid. The sun beat down mercilessly upon the orderly fields of the Reservation. Shem sat sprawled in a chair in the shade of the corrugated metal shed which housed the operator's controls for the two automated tractors which were currently plowing away at the field below him. Far in the distance, across the fields, lay the fence and the barren scrub beyond it that marked the beginning of the outside world. As his eyes wandered idly across it's length, Shem spotted a small figure capering and dancing just on the other side of the fence. Shem leaned forward in his chair and squinted through the sun. It looked like a human aborigine... dressed in some kind of tribal outfit. Shem cocked his ears forward, trying to decipher the man's faint, distant shouting, straining to hear clearly and remember his language class. All he could make out was that the fellow was calling upon "The children of Bula" in a sort of patois to help him in something. Shem briefly considered going and talking to him through the fence, but knew that it was not allowed. Besides, someone could be up in the range with a rifle... several years ago there had been an attempted shooting. Fortunately, the individual in question had been caught as his aircar lifted by the Chilagoe Police, who had raced to the Reservation in response to the emergency call.

Just then, the console alert bell rang shrilly. Shem glanced over from where he was sitting and saw that one of the tractors was running low on fuel. Great. He touched the command pad which would return that tractor to it's bay by the shed and got up. Looking across the field, Shem noticed that the man had disappeared back into the scrub brush. He reached up and scratched his head, then shrugged and went around back, opening the heavy insulated door to the fuel storage room.

It was cool in there, but then again, the alcohol had to be kept cool so it would not build up excessive pressure in the tanks. Shem breathed deeply of the refreshingly chilled air before carefully hefting a 55-gallon drum of alcohol onto a cart and wheeling it back to the front. The tractor had arrived, and sat idling. Shem cursed as he had to walk through the heat wash of the big engine and its coolant system before he could shut it down. As the big engine rumbled to a stop, Shem found himself panting in the hot sun, his tongue lolling out of his mouth, muscles weak. He went back to the chair he had been in and picked up his loose white shirt, draping it across his shoulders. His black fur was absorbing the sunlight and baking him alive. He sprayed some water across his face and drank a little before going back out. He hooked up the hose and pump to the tractor and the drum, spread out the pump's panels and turned it on. The solar-powered pump whirred as it transferred the alcohol from the drum to the tractor's fuel tank. Another great day in the fields, Shem mused. What a life. Why could'nt he have drawn library duty? It was boring in the large stone building in the center of town, but at least it was climate controlled and the ladies were coming in and out...

When the tank was filled, Shem started the tractor up again and had it resume its pattern. He wheeled the empty drum back to the fuel shed and sat against one wall, enjoying the feeling of

the thick, cool nylocrete against his back. As he breathed the cool air, he stared into the dimness, thinking of what he had seen and felt through the sendor helmet. After a bit, he got up, walked to the center of the room and began to stretch, gingerly trying to follow Janet's exercise routine. It was very difficult, as his legs refused to stretch as far as hers seemed able to and his body did not feel as supple or as strong. But it would no doubt improve with practice, Shem mused. After two hours of the strange workout routine that Janet had used, Shem picked up a short length of metal pipe and began practicing his Escrima, the heavy pipe whirling through its patterns with slowly increasing ease.

That evening, after silently enduring several pranks from the terrible trio, as Shem thought of his younger siblings in his own mind, he once again lay down in the privacy of his own room and put on the helmet, his fingers flying through the monopolar contact fields of the workstation's input pad as he leapt from account to account. It was relaxing and gratifying, escaping from his own dreary existence. Intellectually, Shem knew it was really a waste of time, and that all his problems would be there when he woke up. He should be spending the time working out... or something. But, like a good bookreel, he had started viewing the module and was engrossed in the story. At least he would finish it.

* * *

Janet awoke to pain; pins and needles were shooting through every part of her body. She was wrapped in a warm blanket in the back of a van, which was moving. As it jolted and jostled over bumps in the road, excruciating agony swept through her frozen members. She gritted her teeth against the pain and to prevent them from chattering, but otherwise made no sound. Slowly, the pain subsided as she warmed up. Utterly exhausted, she nonetheless tried to follow the conversation of the men sitting in the front seats, but her befuddled mind could not make sense of the words. Eventually she succumbed to the exhaustion that besieged her body and slept.

Awareness came some time later of lying on soft, warm material. Janet sat up slowly as she awoke, looking about. She was lying on a sofa in the central room of a small, rustic cabin. On the table next to her sat a cup of steaming tea. A warm fire blazed in the hearth opposite, next to which sat the huge man, Powerhouse, in a chair, watching her silently. She eyed his unmoving, expressionless face. If she had to, could she kill him in order to escape? She resolved that if she had to, and she could, she would.

Fortunately, Janet was saved from any further problems by the door on the far side of the cabin opening and Linda, followed by the lizard chimaera and the gray-clothed man (now wearing a black uniform but smelling the same). Linda came over and hugged her close. After a few tearful moments of hugging and crying (mostly on Janet's part), Janet told Linda what had happened to her. Linda, outraged, turned on the men and began berating them and threatening to have them locked up. The fellows did seem rather abashed, even ashamed of what they had done. But they were all too quick to rationalize their actions in the face of their current "crisis".

Claiming that they thought Janet had attacked Bridlaun while breaking into the Bear-Sterns brokerage downtown (and why was he breaking in to a brokerage, Janet wondered), they also seemed to suspect her of having knowledge of or even something to do with the death of Psi-Hawk, their friend, or information concerning the defunct Biodyne project. They felt they had acted in the best interests of everyone concerned. In response to this, Linda screamed at them for a while until they were thoroughly cowed and asked Janet what she was going to do with them. Janet, willing to say or do anything to get her away from these people, agreed not to press any charges.
After all, she reasoned to herself, even if she did, it would no doubt cause lots of problems for herself as well. The fact that she was not really a human was bound to come out. Maybe the government would grow angry at her by gathering so much attention and elect to have her terminated. It simply was not worth the risk.

Linda reasoned that if there was someone running around who looked enough like Janet to confuse Bridlaun, this someone would show up again at some point in the future and this problem could be resolved. Linda took Janet away from the little cabin in the Catskills where the men had brought her and took her back downstate to her apartment in New York City again. Obviously, Janet was quite unsettled, but she wanted to get back to work more than anything. Dancing on one of the pedestals in club she would be able to forget her worries and fears for a while, letting all her anxiety flow away with the rhythmic movements of her body. Her sore feet kept her abed for a day or so, but the next night found her dancing once again at the Dirty Gene Pool.

Her return to the club was celebrated with a little party, given by the other girls. Everyone seemed happy to have her back, safe and sound, even the other Janet. Although she never apologized for what she had done or what had passed between them, she appeared contrite and accepted Janet as a fellow dancer, causing no more problems.

It was about 4:00 PM when Linda called Janet into her office and sat her down. Present was the lizard chimaera Bridlaun and the large man known as Powerhouse. Linda explained that she may have found out who the person was that attacked Bridlaun and who had been breaking into the brokerage firm that night -- someone who looked a good deal like Janet. His name was Jarrey, and he was a musician who ofttimes dropped by the club. Janet found this a little hard to believe, as she had never met anyone who looked like her, even amongst the latter-day constructs. Being a Biodyne construct, it was almost impossible for any random mutation to generate features which resembled her to any great degree. Nonetheless, this individual's description, as given by Linda, matched her enough to be mistaken in poor light for Janet. The group decided

to see for themselves if this was the person who had attacked Bridlaun and caused all these problems.

Together, Janet, Linda and the others decided to contact Jarrey and have him come down to the club where they could talk to him. There was some discussion as to who should wait where, but eventually it was ironed out. Linda made a phone call and spoke to Jarrey, making up a short story about a musician, a drummer, who wished to speak with him at the club in regards to joining a band. Jarrey, enthused, said he had something important to do, but would definitely be by around 7 PM. The long wait began.

It was 8:00 PM by the time they decided something had gone wrong. Linda and Janet decided to sneak out the back and go pay a visit to Jarrey's apartment, without Powerhouse or Bridlaun being there to overreact and perhaps scare the fellow to death. As they were driving over there in Linda's car, they heard a report on the radio of some sort of cat creature that had been cornered in the Bear-Sterns brokerage building. Police had surrounded the building and were waiting for reinforcements, including a SWAT team. Several officers had reportedly been injured while attempting to apprehend the creature. Janet and Linda looked at each other strangely. Could it be Jarrey? Turning the car around quickly, tires squealing, Linda headed downtown to the brokerage house. One way or another, they were going to find out.

The pair pulled up in their car to the Bear-Sterns building in a few minutes. The entire street ahead of them was choked with police cars and emergency vehicles, interspersed with media news vans and civilian bystanders. Police were everywhere, rushing about, checking their weapons and equipment. Janet saw a group of ten officers wearing bulletproof vests and carrying shotguns troop through the front doors of the office building. Suddenly the crowd gasped and several people pointed up at the side of the building and shouted. Looking out of the window, Janet saw what looked like a furry head peeking out from one of the office windows. Janet gaped in surprise. It quickly withdrew as spotlights began to play up the wall. Linda cautioned Janet to stay where she was and got out to speak with the police officer in charge.

Janet pulled her collar up and slouched in the seat of the car in an attempt to partially conceal her features. It occurred to her that this might not be the healthiest area to be in at the moment, but she <u>had</u> to find out what was going on. Linda was pointing to the car as she spoke with a tall, beefy policeman with a bullhorn. From the hash marks on his sleeves, Janet guessed that he was in charge here. When the policeman and Linda came over to the car, they held a quick conference. The policeman stared at her oddly, and even jumped a bit when she spoke, a reaction she had not made on people in a long time. From what the officer told them, it appeared several officers had been struck with some sort of blunt object as they attempted to find the creature. None were seriously injured, but apparently the creature was dangerous. Linda asked the officer if they could go in and try to reason with it; she felt that she might be able to get it to surrender without any bloodshed or further conflict.

The policeman was very reluctant, even more so when Janet began making suggestions and comments. When she began asking questions and it appeared that he was out of touch with the officers inside the building and not fully appraised of the situation, Janet became slightly more forward with her suggestions that perhaps it would be wise he contact them. At this imagined sarcasm he grew bellicose and refused to assist them in any way whatsoever. He refused to either provide them with an escort into the building or to radio ahead and let the police inside know that they were coming in. Since the policemen were tense and ready to shoot anything that looked dangerous, it seemed to Janet that entering the building now would seem to border on reckless.

But Janet and Linda decided to go in before the policeman changed his mind and would not let them in at all. As they were walking into the building, one of the camera crews tried to get a close-up of them and successfully identified Linda as the head of PRC, the Paranormal Rights Coalition, but Janet's raised collar prevented them from seeing her face. Only her black hair over the collar was visible.

The lighting was out in the lobby. Everything was pitch-black, and the light from the street outside did not penetrate very far in. Since they had no flashlights, Janet began feeling across the walls for the elevator buttons. After a while, she encountered it, pressed it and called to Linda. The other woman made her way towards the glowing elevator button from the section of the lobby she had been searching. As the bell rung and the doors opened, they saw a young policeman getting up from the floor inside the elevator, groaning and rubbing the back of his head. As he looked up and saw Janet, he gasped and went to draw his pistol. Acting without thinking, Janet stepped close and forced his gun hand to the side and up with a wrist lock, holding the drawn pistol up and out of line with either of them. The policeman winced at the wrist lock and stared at her, but made no other move. Janet and Linda quickly reassured him of their identities and intents, after which he was released. After calling the sergeant outside on his radio, he told them he had been attacked on the 5th floor, and that the creature was heading up to the 6th. Janet, thinking quickly, pressed the button for the 6th floor. Turning to the policeman, she advised him to radio his fellow officers on the 5th floor and to tell them to block all reentry to the 5th floor via stairway. Also, they were to summon all three elevators and hold them at the 5th floor while he and two civilians tried to secure the suspect. He goggled at her rapid-fire, almost military string of suggestions, almost as through she were accustomed to giving orders. "Hey," he said uncertainly. "You know Police Procedure?" After a small, uncertain pause, Janet replied "No", which got her an odd look.

The elevator doors opened on the 6th floor. Janet

peered left and right down the hallway. While no one was in sight, Janet's sensitive ears detected a thump and crash very faintly off to the left. Speaking behind her quickly, she told them to follow her at a distance and set off at a dead run down the hallway. She rounded a bend and saw the body of a policeman slump to the hallway floor from an opened office door. She flattened herself against the wall next to the doorway and waited for the assailant to how himself. A furry head poked partially out of the doorway; Janet made a lunge to grab the person by the neck and throw them to the ground out in the hallway. Unfortunately, the person was very quick and pulled back in time. Not giving her opponent any time to recover from his retreat, Janet ducked low and spun into the room. She found herself confronting a slender feline fellow, a bit shorter than she, who was holding what appeared to be a wooden Kendo practice sword. He appeared completely astounded at her sudden appearance and features, and backed slowly away until he bumped into a file cabinet. Holding his weapon in a defensive stance, he stammered out "Stay back... don't make me hurt you! I don't want to hurt you!". Her sensitive ears picked out the words as he mumbled beneath his breath, "Oh, why did it have to be her, of all people?"

Janet put the confusing words out of her mind for the moment as she stepped forward, weight resting on the balls of her feet. She mentally rehearsed the low cut kick, block and check she would perform if he chose to attack her with the weapon. Hands out placatingly, she said, "Listen, just put the sword down. The building is surrounded. Police are on their way here. You can't get away. Put the sword down and you won't be hurt."

Jarrey, or so Janet assumed him to be, took another step backwards, sliding along the face of the file cabinets. "I'm trying to help you!" whispered Janet urgently. Jarrey slid along the file cabinet a bit more, trying to keep as much space between them as possible. "Just let me go", he whispered back. "I can get away!"

Janet shook her head sadly as her ears caught the footsteps coming down the hall. "There is a policeman coming down the corridor now. It's over, Jarrey. Put down the weapon."

At this moment, the policeman, panting, came around the door frame and covered Jarrey with his pistol. "Freeze!" he shouted. Jarrey cursed and looked at her mournfully as he dropped his wooden sword with a clatter. Janet gestured behind her with one hand. "Cuffs!" she whispered to the officer as he peered at her quizzically. Blinking, he reached back with his left hand to the pouch at his waist and handed her a pair of handcuffs. Staying out of his field of fire, Janet came up to Jarrey and told him to turn around and place his hands behind his back. As he complied, Janet took his hands and locked them into the handcuffs, noting as she did that he had only four fingers on each hand, each much thicker than her own. She softly whispered over his shoulder into his ear, "The cuffs are for your own protection. The police will be more at ease with you in them, and less likely to overreact and maybe hurt you for assaulting some of their fellow officers." She placed her hand on his shoulder to turn him around and felt him tremble. Was he afraid of her for some reason? Behind them, the policeman was talking into his radio and holstering his pistol. Janet had forgotten about the cameras outside, and so was momentarily caught by surprise as the cameramen played their lights and zoom lenses over the group as they emerged from the building surrounded by a group of officers. Although she ducked her head and attempted to conceal herself behind the policemen, she was fairly sure she had been caught on film. Linda hurried her to the car and they left before anything else could happen. They drove silently back to the Dirty Gene Pool, each lost in their thoughts. Who was Jarrey? Why did he look like her? What could he have been doing at the Bear-Sterns building? Why did it seem as though he knew Janet? What would drive a "gentle, musically-inclined individual" to such lengths as attacking policemen? Was it he who had attacked Bridlaun? The answers, of course, would lie with Jarrey. They decided, after speaking with Powerhouse, Energon (the grey-clothed man) and Bridlaun in the back room of the club, to go down and speak with him where he was being held, at Police Headquarters in One Police Plaza.

It was 9:30 PM at Police Headquarters when Janet and Linda went in through the metal detectors and asked to talk with Jarrey. After speaking with the desk sergeant for a while, they were led to a small interviewing room. Janet and Linda sat in stiff wooden chairs on one side of an empty conference table. After a while, Jarrey was led in, handcuffed, dressed in a gray shirt and pants. The officer, after pausing and looking quietly at Janet for a moment, handcuffed Jarrey to one of the arms of the chair he was sitting in and stepped outside, closing the door. Jarrey stared at the table, not looking at them, for a while as the silence stretched. Janet broke it by asking him why he had done what he had done at the Bear-Sterns building. Jarrey was suspicious and unwilling to talk until Linda identified herself as the head of PRC and told him if he cooperated, she would get him legal counsel and bail him out of jail.

At this, Jarrey began talking. Slowly at first, but then in a rush, he told how he had been blackmailed by one of the Vice-Presidents of Bear-Sterns and forced to break into the brokerage in an attempt to destroy certain files. Like Janet, he was a Biodyne construct. But he was a third-generation construct, created just before the closure of the project, cloned from altered DNA taken from one of her cells. He had been grown to near-maturity in an acceleration tank, one of the corporation's most recent developments before they were shut down. He thought that made Janet his mother, and said so. Janet corrected him, explaining that as a clone, he was effectively her twin brother, not her son. Jarrey was bitter, and in a devil-take-it attitude. He was prepared to accept the consequences of the blackmailer's threats if he could, in return, cause him trouble by telling all. Janet cautioned him to silence, promising to go and have a talk with the


Daphne Page...!
1993

blackmailer. If they could assure his silence, they might be able to get the blackmailer to hand over whatever it was he was holding over Jarrey. Since Jarrey had no prior criminal record and he had not taken anything from the Bear-Sterns building (the first time he had been interrupted by Bridlaun, the second caught by the police), the charge would only be Breaking and Entering rather than Robbery. The Resisting Arrest could be plea-bargained away for an easy conviction plea of guilty in the Breaking and Entering. Jarrey would get away with a slap on the wrist, perhaps a supervised release consisting of Probation or merely a fine. In any case, he would be a relatively free man again, without the blackmailer to worry about. Jarrey thought about the offer for a while and then agreed, telling them who and where the blackmailer was. Business concluded, the pair set off to find a Mr. Scott Randolph, VP of Bear-Sterns. As they drove, Janet wondered about Jarrey's story. If he was a clone of her, why was he male? Who had done the cloning? Why would Biodyne have made a clone of her, a failed project?

It was 10:30 PM when the pair pulled up in front of a large, well-lit house in the suburbs of Long Island. A grey Mercedes-Benz sat in the red-tiled driveway, and the wide lawn was fronted with well-trimmed bushes. As they approached the house and rang the doorbell, a dog barked faintly from the backyard. After a few moments, the door was opened by a woman who looked to be in her mid-30s. Her eyes were red, as though she had been crying, and she took a moment to realize what she was looking at in Janet. When she did, her hand went to her throat and she gasped. Linda quickly took over, introducing herself as the head of PRC and asking to see Mr. Randolph. The woman, who turned out to be Mrs. Randolph, hesitantly opened the door and asked them to come in. Sitting down with them in the luxuriously furnished living room, Mrs. Randolph explained that her husband had become so seriously drunk at some bad business news that a friend had taken him to the hospital. Janet explained the situation a little regarding Jarrey and her husband, although she left out the part regarding blackmail. She advised the woman that it might be possible for some of the trouble that would surely follow to be avoided; it was important that her husband contact them as soon as he got home. Linda gave Mrs. Randolph a card with the office number for the Dirty Gene Pool on it. As they were leaving, Janet noticed a toy on the floor and got the scent of another person, perhaps a child, living in the house.

Mr. Randolph called the next day and wanted to arrange a meeting in some neutral place. Linda suggested a small diner opposite the Jacob Javits Convention Center in downtown Manhattan. Mr. Randolph was rather nervous when they met, but mellowed considerably when he learned that Jarrey might be convinced to remain quiet in regards to Mr. Randolph's involvement if he turned over the item(s) that Jarrey felt threatened by. Although he attempted to sidestep the issue a little, he eventually agreed. Janet was very curious as to what it had all been about; Mr. Randolph was only too willing to tell her and Linda. He explained that he had recently acquired a new customer, a Mr. Theorison, a very influential and wealthy man who had instructed him to begin a takeover of a small corporation known as RevCo through subtle means, moving funds about from one dummy company to another so as to avoid the appearance of someone making a big buy-in. Nothing illegal, mind you, just devious. Randolph had been all too quick to catch on to the implications of this. In addition to procuring Mr. Theorison's stock in RevCo, he also purchased blocks, and advised his close circle of friends to do the same. It turned out that RevCo was a front for a criminal organization that was closed down by the FBI. Not only was the stock now worthless, but all holders of the stock were being investigated. Theorison, who it was rumored had strong mob ties, ordered Randolph to "do anything he had to" to get rid of the "evidence" of the stock buyouts. In desperation, Randolph had used a bit of information that he had laid aside earlier and forced the young man to break in to the company at night with instructions to steal the Theorison file and some others... those of Randolph's friends who had purchased the stock. When the FBI came, there would be nothing to find in the records regarding stock transfers and there would be no concrete, indictable proof of his involvement. Unfortunately, Jarrey bungled it. Twice. The first time he said he had been attacked by some sort of lizard-like man, and the second he had tripped one of the alarms and been caught by the police. Linda, who had scarcely been able to contain herself, questioned Randolph fiercely about Mr. Theorison. Randolph suddenly recognized her as Theorison's private secretary and wondered why it was that she knew nothing about this. He made a few sarcastic comments to which Linda retorted. It looked as though Linda was going to physically attack him when Janet intervened. Speaking quietly and rationally, she tried to calm them down. Linda left in a huff, and Janet was able to conclude the talks with Mr. Randolph. Randolph was in trouble, even more so if Jarrey talked. Janet had him over a barrel and they both knew it. He promised to get the blackmail item from where he had secreted it and turn it over to them in three days. Janet went with Linda to visit Jarrey at One Police Plaza and explained what was going on and the nature of the deal they had worked out with Randolph. Jarrey understood and agreed, but wondered why they were doing all of this to help him. Although his question was general, it was directed at Janet. She found herself at a loss for words. Why was she working so hard to get him safely through this? She could not explain or analyze her motivations, most of them being subconscious. After a few moments, she explained that he was her brother; surely that had to mean something. Jarrey did not really appear convinced, but neither did Janet, as she suspected something more was afoot. The questions she had about his story rose to her mind, but she said nothing.

* * *

Shem shut the helmet down and saved his position. Things were getting stranger and stranger... he could not make heads or tails out of what was happening to Janet. As of yet, she had not really

done any serious workout that would give him any interesting techniques. It was a faint hope from the beginning. He went to sleep, but his dreams were troubled.

The next day was planting day. After a yawning, tired Shem was dropped off in his section by the airbus, he wasted no time, but got the heavy planting units attached to the tractors and filled with seeds from the shed. After running the planting program, Shem dozed in his chair as the tractors followed one another across the fields in the hot summer sun.

Shem awoke with a start and rolled out of his chair in one springlike motion. His eyes darted to the door and then the roofline. His hand reached for ... something ... what was he doing? Shem came fully awake, straightened up from his crouch and looked over to the console. Both tractor fuel alerts were beeping, and had been doing so for some time. Shem touched the console and cursed. Both units had run out of fuel in different corners of the field. He looked out at the field and the heat waves coming up and sighed. He filled the five-gallon jerrycan and started walking with it. As he walked, we wondered why it was called a jerrycan. Marl had said it had something to do with a war that happened a long time ago, but he never really had time to look it up. Damn thing sure was heavy. Shem grunted as he lugged the can across the uneven rows of plowed earth. Suddenly he stopped, remembering what had happened when the console alarms had woken him up. Had he been dreaming? Shem looked back across the field at the shed and down at the can. After a while, he shrugged and kept trudging.

After he dumped the five gallons of alcohol into the first tractor's fuel tank, he rode it back to the shed, refueled it fully and drove it over to the second, where he repeated the process, muttering all the while at his idiocy and at the idiocy of the programmers of the tractor control system. Since the tractors had to return to the shed to be refueled, why not simply have them return when the fuel was low instead of requiring the operator to bring them back? Shem briefly considered bypassing the station's lockouts and rewriting the control program, but discarded the notion. Any change in the program would be noticed by the next shift worker, and trouble was sure to come of it. Maybe if he wrote a suggestion for the next Community meeting...

Back at the control shed, Shem set the tractors to continue where they had left off and slumped in the chair, dusty from his long walk across the fields and panting from the heat and extertion. A horn blared from the road that ran behind the shed, causing him to jump. Muttering vile imprecations, Shem got up, walked around the shed and stopped in his tracks.

Mren was sitting in one of the Reservation's white aircars, looking over at him. She waved as he slowly came up.

"Hi! I was just driving by and I noticed I was a little low. I wondered if you could spare a couple of gallons of alc?"

Her voice was sweet and melodic. Shem looked down at his dirty white work shirt and hands as he forced himself to stop panting. Why now? Why? Could anything else go wrong?

"Ummm... yeah. Sure, Mren." he said.

She squinted at him. "Marl, right?" she said. "I really appreciate this. I'd hate to run out... this heat is something else today."

Shem blinked at her. "No, it's Shem. My brother's name is Marl." He turned away from her truck and walked back to the fuel storage room, a strange pain in his chest. She had not even remembered his name.

Mren tapped her fingers on the console as the fellow turned away. He seemed a little upset. Maybe she had hurt his feelings by not remembering his name properly. Shrugging, she closed the window and turned up the air conditioning a notch.

Shem picked up the jerrycan and ran it full of alcohol from a nearby drum, Mren's words echoing in his mind. Why was it that everyone remembered Marl over him? Was it because he was taller? More handsome? Why had she forgotten him? He had spoken with her privately at a Community Meeting last week, gotten her a drink and even danced with her once... briefly... maybe he needed to make more of an impression somehow... but how? He watched the alcohol splash into the can glumly, lost in thought.

To be continued in Issue #2

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ISSUE 1 THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ANTHROPOMORPHICS ISSN 1071-8745

